

E S S A Y S
ON THE
BEING of a GOD,
HIS
GOVERNING and PRESERVING
P R O V I D E N C E;
AND
Also some farther Thoughts
ON THE
NECESSITY and CERTAINTY
OF A
DIVINE REVELATION.

By HAMON L'ESTRANGE, Esq;

L O N D O N :

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ESSAYS

BEING OF A GOLD

GOVERNING AND PRESERVING
PROVIDENCE



NECESSITY AND CERTAINTY

DIVINE REVELATION.

By HANON LESTRANGE, Esq.

LONDON

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PREFACE.

BY the invaluable blessing of a Religious, Christian, and Wise Education, and the Goodness of my Creator towards me, for which I am bound with the highest sense of gratitude to express my thankfulness as long as I have my Being, as it made me so far happy in my way of thinking, early to consider I was not sent into the world only to serve and please myself; consequently the Honour and Glory of God, the Service of my King and Country, and the Good of my fellow creatures in general, must necessarily require my attention, and be thought my duty; which consideration made me engage with the utmost pleasure, satisfaction and application, in those laudable works, to answer as far as I was able the end

of my creation; being convinced by daily experience, what the wise Heathen said, is found too true; *Nibil agenda, mala agere discas*: which, for the sake of my unlearned Readers, I shall turn into *English* in the following words; namely, “that Idleness is the Root of all Evil.”

THE minds of children are fitly to be compared to a field or garden uncultivated and unsown with good seed, for want of which, plenty of unprofitable weeds will naturally spring up in such field or garden; so it will be with the minds of young persons, if good seeds are not early sown there, that is, the seeds of Christianity and all moral duties. Common reason convinces us that noxious weeds, productive of Vice and Irreligion, will be the furniture of the uncultivated mind. If what a Heathen Poet has said be rational and just, which I think must be allowed to be so, viz. *Quo semel est imbuta recens, servabit odorem, testis diu*. How careful then ought all Parents and Guardians to be
(if

(if they desire to make the children under their care both good and wise) to season the *recens testa*, the minds of children with the sweet and wholesome odors of Piety and Virtue? I have been led into these thoughts and declarations by some absurd and dangerous opinions I have lately met with in regard to the education of children, *i. e.* that no principles of Religion of any sort ought to be instilled into children, but that the mind is to be left to its natural freedom to examine and choose when it comes to maturity, either some Religion or no Religion, according as their judgments lead them; and that seasoning the mind in its infancy with any good impressions, is biasing and warping it, and rendering it incapable of judging impartially.

As I have already spoke my sentiments about this matter, all that I shall add more on the occasion, *is this*, That if the notions above mentioned are embraced, adieu to the pure Religion of Jesus Christ, if not to all virtue and morality; for if children are wholly left to them-

themselves till their natural passions grow equally strong with their reason, there will be very small hopes of their turning their thoughts to a lesson so destructive of those *then* mature appetites and inclinations that human nature is so prone and addicted to; little or no time is *then* like to be spared from sensual enjoyments, to think about religious and moral duties, when they had never before been imprest on their minds.

WE are directed by a wise man, and one that we Christians think was divinely inspired; if so, what he said must certainly be right; *To train up a child in the way that he should go, and when he is old he will not depart from it*, Prov. xxii. 6.

I SHOULD be glad to be informed of the ill consequences that can follow, from the mind's being early seasoned with pious and virtuous sentiments: If what the objector says be true, that it is warping and biasing of it; is there any hurt in biasing the mind to what is good and praise-worthy, in order to happiness in this world and eternal happiness in the next?

next? It is most certain, the mind will be fruitful of something, either good or evil; is it not therefore highly adviseable to plant it early with good seeds?

I MAY venture to say, the contrary position is big with destruction to the souls of men, which consideration hath moved me to say what I have done, being solicitous for the eternal welfare of my fellow creatures as well as my own; for I may say with strict truth, I do not make public my *Labours in the Lord* out of vanity or with a view of profit; being sensible I am not learned and accurate enough in my productions to give a title to the first, and as I am an Author only to instruct the poor and illiterate, my plain, but wholesome fare, they are heartily welcome to, without money; and I sincerely wish it may nourish their souls to eternal life.



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CHAP. I.

On the Being of a GOD.

IT must be confessed, tho' we have many practical Atheists in the world, we have not, I think, at this present time any avowed advocates for Atheism worthy of notice ; the great patrons of it, are gone to be made sensible, to their eternal shame and confusion, of the Being of a GOD ; that is, of one supreme, independent, self-existing Cause from all eternity, which must be the original Cause of all other things, visible and invisible. Without allowing this, it will be impossible to avoid plunging into the most glaring absurdities ; to attempt a rational produc-
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tion

tion of the world from any other Cause. One of the Champions * for Atheism would allow of no other God but the Universe, and that the world was always what we see it now, and will continue so for ever. Others there were, who imagined men sprung out of the earth like mushrooms; and not finished as they appear now, but by a piece at a time, a Leg at one time, and an Arm at another, and so on, till by chance (for the Reader must understand, that according to the Atheists system, Chance had a great share towards the formation of this glorious fabrick, the world, and all its admirable furniture) the parts met together and cemented, and became at last a beautiful human creature. It would be endless, and indeed misspending my time, to take notice of all the ridiculous and absurd conjectures about the formation of the heavens and the earth, such as the fortuitous jumbling together of atoms, &c. &c.

SOME Atheists of superior understanding to those above mentioned, have endeavoured to account for the formation of the world and all its inhabitants, without the help of an unoriginated and omnipotent Being, we call God; but their labours have been in vain; their several arguments having been evidently confuted and exploded, proved senseless and absurd, by a cloud of more learned men than themselves; some of whose names I shall have occasion to mention afterwards.

* SPINOZA.

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IF there was no one thing in the creation but man, to demonstrate an unoriginated, eternal and omnipotent Being, who was the creator of the world, sure man alone would be sufficient to do it, who is known to be made capable of thinking, reasoning, contriving, concerting, judging of right and wrong, laying deep schemes for his own security, advancement in riches, honour and power; and for promoting all sensual enjoyments. Now until I am better informed than I have been as yet, from the most philosophical and sagacious Atheists, I cannot conceive how a lump of clay, or any other lifeless piece of matter came to be fashioned originally like man, and have life breathed into him; voluntary motion given him, together with all those faculties before mentioned, unless done by an eternal, self-existing and Almighty Being.

IT is indeed very extraordinary that man, who is so vain and proud in other respects, should be so very humble in the matter of his creation; for sure I am, it is much greater honour and credit for man to be created by a wise God, and as it is said in sacred writ, in the likeness of God, than by Chance; we know not how; perhaps from putrefaction, as the Atheists have asserted some insects to be produced, which is clearly demonstrated to be absolutely false.

GOOD God! how unaccountably perverse is mankind? to decry and reject with scorn religious mysteries, stamp'd with Divine authority, when they do not tally with their Hypotheses, and at

other times when it suits their purpose, appear fond of them, if ever so absurd and contrary to all sense and reason. For it is most certain, nothing can be a deeper mystery than man's being brought into Being at first; that is, to have a living soul, motion, and intelligence any other way than by an Almighty agent, we call God: this would most certainly be the only rational account of man's, and every other living creature's coming originally into Being, if we were left to our own conjectures about it: But as we are told by the best authority, it was so, the matter will bear no contest.

AGAIN, though I have endeavoured to shew that man alone is a sufficient evidence of the Being of a God, if we had no other; I may justly say every thing in the creation convincingly proves the truth of it, and that they all proceed from the same first Cause; who, that has eyes to behold the stupendous expanse of the visible world, with all its imbelishments; its surprizing variety and uniformity; its order and regularity; can help crying out, in the words of the Royal Psalmist, that *the Heavens declare the glory of God*, and that *the firmament shews forth his handy work*: And likewise with St Paul, the great Apostle of the Gentiles, that from the creation of the world, His (God's) eternal power and Godhead may be easily understood from the light of reason; so that the Apostle thought even the Gentile world without excuse in not finding out

out with certainty the Creator, God blessed for evermore.

AGAIN, The same Apostle reprehends the Gentiles for not finding out the proper object of their worship, which the light of nature might easily have directed them to, but paying worship to the creatures instead of the Creator; so, they were more properly Idolaters than Atheists: though I make no doubt but there was a mixture of both.

HISTORY, as I remember, tells of two or three instances of persons dying martyrs to Atheism; which seems to me incredible, because the nature of man tends to self-preservation, and to the enjoyment of life, as long as possible; and as it is certain the Atheists indulge themselves in all the pleasures and advantages of it, and indeed have no reason to the contrary, it appears quite unaccountable they should be willing to leave them, and be annihilated before their time, or rather, be damned before their time; for can an Atheist expect mercy from the God he denies against the most irresistible evidences for the truth and certainty of His Being; a truth we may be as infallibly sure of, as if we saw Him with our bodily eyes? The most illiterate, who is capable of thinking at all about things, and makes the least observation, must see Him in a thousand instances; and whosoever is so stupid as not to do it, without some further help than his own understanding, I must recommend to him the reading Mr Ray's *Wisdom of God in the Crea-*

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tion *. And to such as have any knowledge of metaphysical, philosophical, and mathematical learning, let the great Mr *Boyle*, Sir *Isaac Newton*, Dr *Clarke*, and Mr *Locke*, &c. employ their time.

BUT notwithstanding the grand supporters of Atheism have been driven from their holds, and not able to stand their ground against the Believers in God and Jesus Christ, they have left their tools behind them; which some minute dabblers in Atheism make use of to stifle their checks of conscience, which at times give them some uneasy twitches for their enormous wickednesses; but these Sceptics, like the Psalmist's fool, only dare say in their hearts, and by their wicked lives, or perhaps among some particular companions, *There is no God*; for as they are unable to defend their opinions by any rational arguments, so they are ashamed publicly to own them; and instead of Atheism, take shelter in Deism. And so far we agree; but can by no means allow that natural religion is the only religion given us by God; it was indeed originally so, but God soon after the creating of man, did by degrees, and at various times and manners, make known his will to mankind, before it was made compleat and perfect by the christian dispensation: And to speak the very truth, it is the strictness and purity of the Christian Religion

* See also Mr *Derham's* Demonstration of the Being and Attributes of God from his Works of Creation.

that

that is the stumbling-block in their way to the belief of it.

SIN was the parent of Atheism; and vice and wickedness have produced every species of Infidelity; for we are very unwilling to believe that to be true, which if true, must either make us forsake many of our most beloved enjoyments in this world, or be miserable hereafter. What can a righteous man, that fears God and walks in his ways, desire and wish for more ardently than that there may be a God, and a future state? For annihilation must be a shocking thought to a good man; indeed, it is preferable to eternal misery.

AGAIN, What can a virtuous and good man rejoice more at, than having a clear revelation of God's will, and of an assurance of an eternal and unspeakable reward for obeying it; therefore surely, nothing but a desire of ignorance, as a plea for sinning, can make the Atheist disbelieve the Being of a God, or the Deist reject the Christian Revelation.

IF what I have said already will not make the Being of a God evident from the light of Reason, I shall demonstrate the truth of it from sacred Record; and why is not sacred History to be credited as well as profane, since it is better attested? There we are told GOD made the World, and after that He made Man of the dust of the ground, and *breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and man became a living soul*; moreover, that man might have some knowledge

of his Creator, GOD thought fit to enter into some converse with him, and made a covenant with him to this effect; That he might freely eat of every tree of the garden in which he was placed, except one, which was the tree of the knowledge of good and evil: and farther told him what punishment would be inflicted on him, if he disobeyed his command, which was no less than the certainty of dying; *Gen. ii. 15, 16, 17.* Whether *Adam* knew the nature of this punishment, I will not venture to determine, but so much he must know, that it was something shocking and terrible.—But no more; this being a digression from my intended purpose: so shall proceed to give a farther account of our Creator's making himself known to mankind: It appears from *Moses's* history, that after *Adam* and *Eve's* transgression God talked with them both, by way of exhortation on the occasion, *Gen. iii. 9, &c.* after that, God made himself known to *Cain*, by talking with him about his being wroth that he had respect to *Abel's* offering and not to his, as also about the murder of his brother *Abel*: The next intercourse God had with man, was with his righteous servant *Noah*, to whom he gave directions about building the ark, *Gen. vi. 13.* after this, God condescended to enter into some conversation with his favourite *Abraham*, to whom also it is said he appeared, and told him (*Abram*) what he would do for his seed, *Gen. xii. 1—7.* God spake at other times to *Abram*; but the most remarkable one was

was when he appeared to him, and said, *I am the Almighty God, walk before me, and be thou perfect*, Gen. xvii. We must not imagine that God appeared in any comparative form or likeness, only that he appeared in glory; which must be very tremendous, because it is said, ver. 3. that *Abraham* fell on his face.

AFTER this, we find, Gen. xxii. that God talked with *Abraham* again; and then the sacrificing his son was the subject of their conversation; which *Abraham* readily comply'd with at the command of God, and was going that instant to execute it, had he not been prevented by the Angel of the Lord calling to him out of heaven, ver. 11. This Angel of the Lord is supposed to be the Divine *λογος*, the Son of God, afterwards incarnate: and though in all the other texts it is said *God spake*, and *God appeared*, there is great reason to believe it was the same divine person (God the Son) that spake and appeared to the several persons before mentioned; and likewise the same Angel of the Lord that appeared afterwards to *Moses* in a flame of fire out of the midst of a bush, *Exod.* iii. 2. and at verse the fourth, the same divine person is stiled both Lord and God; and at ver. 6. it appears the same divine person said to *Moses*, *I am the God of thy father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob*: and it is added, *Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look upon God*.

AFTER

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AFTER this, God and *Moses* had many conferences, which I shall omit mentioning, and go on to *Exod. xix. 9.* where the Lord said unto *Moses*, *Lo, I come unto thee in a thick cloud, that the people may hear when I speak with thee, &c. to ver. 18.* where it is said, *Mount Sinai was altogether on a smoke, because the Lord descended upon it in fire, and the smoke thereof ascended as the smoke of a furnace, and the whole mount quaked greatly, and the voice of the trumpet sounded long, and waxed louder and louder; Moses spake, and God answered him by a voice.* After that, God gave the people some laws which we call the Ten Commandments, chap. *xx. 21, 22.* *And the people stood afar off, and Moses drew near unto the thick darkness where God was; And the Lord said unto Moses, Thus shall you say unto the children of Israel; ye have seen that I have talked with you from Heaven.* At chap. *xxiv.* the Lord said unto *Moses*, *Come up unto the Lord, thou and Aaron, Nadab and Abihu, and seventy of the elders of Israel, and worship ye afar off: and Moses alone shall come near the Lord; but they shall not come nigh, neither shall the people go up with him:* After this, early the next morning, it appears to be by the history; *Moses built an altar under the hill, and offered burnt offerings and peace offerings, &c.* After which, the text says, *Moses, Aaron, Nadab and Abihu, and the seventy elders, went up again; to the mount, I conceive; and they saw the God of Israel, and there was under his*

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his feet, as it were a paved work of a saphire stone, and as it were the body of heaven in his clearness; and upon the nobles of the children of Israel, he laid not his hand: Also they saw God, and did eat and drink; and the Lord said unto Moses, Come up to me into the mount. And Moses rose up, and his minister Joshua, and Moses went up into the mount of God, and a cloud covered the mount, and the glory of the Lord abode upon mount Sinai, and the cloud covered it six days, and the seventh day he called unto Moses out of the middle of the cloud; and the sight of the glory of the Lord was like devouring fire, on the top of the mount, in the eyes of the children of Israel: And Moses went into the midst of the cloud, and gat him up into the mount, where he continued forty days and forty nights, ver. 9, 10, 11, 13, 15, 16, 17, 18. And God gave unto Moses, when he had made an end of communing with him upon mount Sinai, two tables of testimony, tables of stone, written with the finger of God, Exod. xxxi. 18. Again, chap. xxxiii. 9, 11. And it came to pass as Moses entered into the tabernacle, the cloudy pillar descended, and stood at the door of the tabernacle, and the Lord talked with Moses; and the Lord spake unto Moses face to face, as a man speaketh unto his friend. At ver. 18, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23, we find Moses requested the Lord to shew him his glory; and the Lord said, I will make all my goodness to pass before thee. And the Lord said, Thou canst not see my face, for there shall no man see me and live. And the Lord said, Behold there
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is a place by me, and thou shalt stand upon a rock; and it shall come to pass while my glory passeth by, I will put thee in a cleft of the rock, and I will cover thee with my hand while I pass by; and I will take away my hand, and thou shalt see my back parts, but my face shall not be seen.

IT is needless to take up my readers time with any farther proofs from sacred writ, which are innumerable, to demonstrate the Being of a God. Whosoever believes *Moses's* History, and the rest of the Old and New Testament, to be facts, and no fables, he will want no other evidence to be fully convinced of the truth of it, without the assistance of the light of reason. And indeed, we ought to esteem it as an act of unparalleled goodness and condescension in our Creator, to make himself so known to mankind (over and above the works of creation) as to leave us without excuse, if we did not believe in, adore, and serve him.

MOREOVER, we receive from the scriptures a much clearer light into, and idea of the nature and attributes of the great Creator of the world, than the bare light of reason could possibly give us; we are told in the sacred writings, that God is a Spirit, and that we must worship him in spirit and in truth; and from the same inspired authors we are informed, that God's governing and preserving Providence is over all his works: which by some hath been denied, who have allowed the existence of a God. How the belief of the one is consistent with the disbelief of the other,

other, is, I freely confess, beyond my capacity to comprehend: for sure I am, that nothing can be more absurd, and contrary to common sense, than to suppose, that *that Being* who thought fit to make the world, should afterwards leave it to shift for itself, and have no concern about it: The light of reason, I say, must in general discover this to mankind; but if we will believe the sacred history, we shall there find particular and very glaring instances of God's governing and preserving Providence; and if he did it in the infancy of the world, there is no doubt to be made of his continuing to do it, though not in the same manner discoverable by us; nor is there the same reason for it, as God has for some thousand years past made himself sufficiently known to his rational creatures, as I shall make evidently appear in the following Essays.



C H A P. II.

On God's Governing Providence.

HAVING in my first chapter shewed that man might by the mere light of reason, with great certainty, find out a supreme Being we call God, to be the Creator of the world, which

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which indeed is now publickly denied by very few, if any : And having likewise confirmed the truth of it by inspired authority ; I shall in this take the same method, by endeavouring to shew that we might with proper attention find out by our natural capacities God's government and super-intendency of the affairs of all his creatures, if we had no knowledge of it from sacred records ; and that he is not an unactive, indolent Being, as some Heathens have represented him.

IT is a common expression, " that things go on according to the course of nature, or rather according to the laws of nature ;" words without any meaning to many that use them ; so I will take the liberty to give my sense of them, which I take to be this : That by things going on according to the laws of nature, is going on according to the first order, direction, and intention of the Creator, not by blind Chance ; for God is properly the God of nature. When God Almighty had finished all his works, he saw that every thing was good and perfect that he had made, without any occasion for alteration in the course of nature, by way of improvement or amendment, nor has he ever done it with that view ; he has miraculously done it in several cases (which I shall have occasion to take notice of afterwards) to display his power for the good of his creatures, and to evince that he is not regardless of the work of his hands.

I AM willing to allow that generally speaking things do go on according to the premier
intention

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intention of the Author of nature, without inverting the laws of nature, as was done in *Hezekiah's* days by the sun's going backward, and in *Joshua's*, when the sun and moon stood still a whole day, &c.* Nor is there the same reason for it in these later ages; in the first ages of the world men's understandings were so darkened in regard to any proper knowledge of the Deity, that it was necessary God Almighty should make himself known by some very affecting and uncommon acts of power, in order to make men sensible that he is constantly about our path, and about our bed, and spies out all our ways, and understands our thoughts long before, and that nothing escapes his all-seeing eye. And to confirm the truth of this, I proceed to produce evidences from the sacred writings, which I hope will be credited as an authentic history of facts, by those who do not admit their divine original.

I SHALL begin with the world in its infancy, and go on to the dawnings of Christianity; after which time, God Almighty, who in wisdom knows the fitness of things, did not in so remarkable a manner discover his over-ruling providence as he had done before, though he continues the same care over all his works, and will do so till the consummation of all things: But we are now left to discover his judgments and mercies by our own observation; but alas!

* 2 Kings xx. 8, 9, 10, 11. Joshua x. 13.

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we are too careless and unthinking to take a proper notice of either, being apt to think, if we think about them at all, that they come by chance: so that we are unthankful for his mercies, and so insensible of the cause of his judgments, as not to turn into the way of righteousness, in order to avert them. For our good God declares he delights not in punishing his creatures; so that it evidently appears when his judgments are upon the earth, they are sent for our reformation.

THE first instance I shall give of God's taking notice of what is done here below, shall be of *Cain's* affair, who killed his brother *Abel*; the case was so extraordinary, and the act so wicked, that God thought fit to let him know there was an omniscient Being, and that his brother's blood cried unto him from the ground for vengeance, *Gen. iv.*

THE next convincing proof of God's governing the world, and likewise of his omniscience, that I shall take notice of, was his directing *Noah* to prepare an ark for his own and family's safety from the universal deluge, wherein every soul except *Noah's* family was to be destroyed; and as a standing warning and lesson to the new world to avoid splitting on the same rock: for God Almighty's patience was quite worn out with seeing the earth so filled with violence, and that all flesh had corrupted its way upon the earth, though the world was not then seventeen hundred years old, when destroyed by water; and

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and *Lamech*, *Noah's* father, lived fifty years with *Adam* himself; which makes it wonderful they should so soon forget God their Creator.

By *Moses's* account, *Noah's* family was the only righteous family at the coming on of the Flood; for which reason they were preserved, to raise, if possible, a generation of righteous men. But it was not long before they began to degenerate from the righteous stock, by concerting wicked devices; which made them fall under the displeasure of their Creator: who, in order to disappoint their grand, vain, and ambitious design of Building the Tower of *Babel*, confounded their language; so that they were not able to go on with their concerted project; but were forced to part from one another, and disperse over the face of the whole earth.

It was not many Generations, before the true Religion began to decline and decay again; which may receive its date from *Nimrod*, the son of *Cush*, the grandson of *Ham*, who was one of *Noah's* sons: which evinces the necessity of a standing Revelation of the will of God.

THE Gentile world was called by God himself a *state of darkness*; how then can the Religion-of-nature-men venture to assert, that the light of nature, without any Revelation, is sufficient to direct us how to serve and please God? But to proceed—The next extraordinary event I shall take notice of, is that of *Balaam's* Ass speaking to his Master: This was naturally a dumb *Beast*, like other Beasts, but by the power of God was

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made

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made to *ſpeak*, to reproach his Maſter for his ill uſage of him; and likewise to let *Balaam* underſtand, that his going to *Balak* was diſpleaſing to God, becauſe he acted in ſome reſpects contrary to his command, *Numb. xxii.*

AGAIN, Can any thing more demonſtrate the governing Providence of God over the world, and alſo his Divine Attributes of omniſcience and omnipreſence, than the account given us in *2 Kings xx.* of *Hezekiah's* ſickneſs, and of God's adding to his days fifteen years upon his praying earneſtly, with ſore weeping, to his God, that he might not die: He being told by the Prophet *Iſaiab*, by the expreſs command of God, that he ſhould die; with directions to prepare himſelf for it. However, *Hezekiah* being diffident about his recovery, and living fifteen years longer, God Almighty was ſo indulgent to him, as to work a miracle to convince him, that his promiſe of adding to his life ſo many years ſhould certainly be performed; and it was the very ſign that *Hezekiah* prayed for, which was, to make the ſun alter its natural and regular courſe, and go backwards ten degrees, inſtead of going forwards, as it always had done from its firſt giving light to the world.

METHINKS I hear it ſaid, I trouble myſelf to little purpoſe, being about a needleſs work; for as the Bible is, or may be in every one's hands that can read, I diſcover nothing to my Readers but what may be found there. I freely own, what I deliver on this occaſion may be found diſperſed

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disperſed in the ſacred Writings ; but I will not allow I ſpend my time in vain, becauſe I ſpend it much to my ſatisfaction, and with greater pleaſure this way than any other ; as I am uſing my beſt endeavours to prove the Being of a GOD, and his eſſential Attributes ; and in particular, thoſe of his governing and preſerving Providence over the world : Moreover, my intention is to do honour to my Creator ; and ſure I am, when ſo employed, I cannot be miſſpending my time. I am endeavouring to convince (from facts in ſacred hiſtory, that there is a Governing Providence) ſuch as do not believe it already, notwithstanding they acknowledge an eternal divine Being ; and likewiſe, that the Scriptures are of divine original ; otherwiſe, it would be in vain to bring proofs from them.

BESIDES all this, being ſenſible that Books are too often read without much thought and attention, which is the reaſon there is no more improvement made by Reading ; and I am ſorry to ſay this is more likely to be the caſe with many Bible-Readers than of any other Book, unleſs when read by Infidels to make it the object of their Ridicule and Blaſphemous Jeſts : I have the greater reaſon to reſreſh the memories of careleſs Readers ; and withal put together the moſt important things on the ſame ſubject, that they may be the better conſidered and attended to, than they are likely to be, when diſperſed, and only occaſionally brought in with other ſubjects.

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FROM these motives I shall proceed in my design of giving proofs from sacred Record, of the interposition of a Deity in the Government of the world. What a series of stupendous miracles were wrought in *Egypt*, at the Red Sea; at the giving of the Law at Mount *Sinai*; in the wilderness for forty years together; and also at their first entrance into the land of *Canaan*.

I CANNOT help being very minute in relating some events, because they most irresistibly discover an over-ruling Providence in the affairs of this world; and always with views of doing good to mankind; whether it be by punishment inflicted, or by preservation or protection from evil of any kind. The first I shall take notice of, is the very extraordinary History of *Joseph* and his Brethren: It appears from the account we have in Sacred Writ, that his Brethren at first had thoughts of murdering him, if *Reuben*, one of his Brothers, and a man of better morals and more humanity than the rest, had not prevented their doing so wicked an act; however, it appears that *Reuben* was not altogether blameless, for he went so far as to agree to have him put into a deep Pit, where he must certainly have perished, if some *Ismaelites* had not happened to pass by, just at that juncture, in their way to *Egypt*; upon which accident, *Judah*, one of *Joseph*'s Brothers, proposed selling him to the *Ismaelite* Merchants, rather than have him die in the Pit; which they all agreed to: So a Bargain was immediately struck, and *Joseph* was carried
into

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into *Egypt*, and sold to *Potiphar*, Captain of *Pharaoh's* Guard. For the rest of this History I refer my Reader to *Gen. xxxvii. & seq.* making only one remark on the occasion; that this very marvelous transaction was brought about by the Providence of God, for such wise and good purposes as he fore-knew would ensue from the criminal conduct of *Joseph's* Brethren. I do not mean, that God Almighty was any way the occasion of it; for though God often permits evil to be done, as he did in *Joseph's* case, he cannot be the Author of evil, or in the least degree accessory to it. We are free agents, and God Almighty's prescience of our actions does by no means take away the liberty of our wills. So that God's intention to bring good out of evil, in *Joseph's* affair, did not at all alleviate the unnatural wickedness of *Joseph's* Brethren. In this case, God Almighty display'd his Preserving, as well as his Governing Providence.

I SHALL next take notice of the wonderful Providence of God in his protection of *Moses*, by his influencing the hearts of the *Egyptian* midwives, so that notwithstanding their King's strict command, to kill all the male Children born of the *Hebrew* women, they did not do it, but *saved them alive, because they feared God*, (as the text expresses it;) by which means, by the Providence of God, *Moses* was preserved to perform that great work which God had predestin'd him to do. I shall omit relating the manner by which *Moses* was preserved, after escaping

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death at his birth, till I come to treat more particularly of God's Preserving Providence.

To enumerate all the instances of the over-ruling Providence of God that are recorded in the Bible, would be quite unnecessary; because if it appears beyond contradiction by facts already taken notice of, and by more I may hereafter take notice of, that he does in some cases manifestly appear to govern the world, it is most certain he always did, and always will: though indeed his over-ruling Providence is not so conspicuous under the Christian dispensation, as it was for several thousand years before the birth of our Saviour Jesus Christ; nor was it necessary it should be so, because whilst mankind had only the light of reason to guide them, it was, I think, impossible, without a particular illumination, to know so much of God, and his glorious Attributes, as they did under the *Mosaic* dispensation, and do now under the clearer light of the Gospel.

MAN might, by the light of nature, be assured there was a Being, we call GOD, that made the world, and all things therein; but then, by the light of reason man could not discover his Essence unerringly, or many of his Attributes, nor yet his Will as to the conduct of our lives; all which, we are now ascertained of from the mouth of God; and moreover, are so happy as to have given us from the same Divine Oracle a compleat system of Rules to be the guide of our thoughts, words, and actions.

I SHALL

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I SHALL now enforce what I have delivered concerning God's Governing Providence over the world, by making some quotations out of the Royal Psalmist, who was an inspired writer: so I flatter myself his thoughts will have great weight on the occasion. In *Psalm lix*, he calls upon God to *deliver him from his enemies*, and to *defend him from them that rise up against him*. Verse 11. *Slay them not, lest my people forget: scatter them by thy power, and bring them down, O Lord our shield*: Verse 13. *Let them know that God ruleth in Jacob unto the ends of the earth*. *Psalm lxvi. 7.* he says, *God ruleth by his power for ever; His eyes behold the nations: Let not the rebellious exalt themselves*. *Psalm lxxv. 7.* *For God is the judge; he putteth down one, and setteth up another*. *Psalm xcvi. and xcix.* *The Lord reigneth, let the earth rejoice: Let the multitude of isles be glad thereof. The Lord reigneth, let the people tremble*. *Psalm cxxxv. 6.* *Whatsoever the Lord pleased, that did he in heaven and in earth, in the seas, and in all deep places*. After which, the Psalmist recounts all the wondrous works done by God in *Egypt* and *Canaan*; and also of *Pharaoh's* overthrow in the *Red Sea*. Again, in *Psalm cxxxix*, he elegantly displays God's all-seeing Providence in the following words: *O Lord, thou hast searched me, and known me; thou knowest my down-sitting, and up-rising: thou understandest my thoughts afar off. For there is not a word in my tongue, but lo, O Lord, thou knowest it altogether, &c.* See the whole *Psalm*,

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which is to the same purpose. Again, *The Lord upholdeth all that fall, and raiseth up all those that be bowed down.*

I SHALL finish my proofs from sacred writ, of God's over-ruling and governing Providence, with a declaration of our Saviour's to his audience; though I have materials for many more, and convincing ones too, which may be found in the Bible; *Matt. x. 29, 30.* where he saith, *Are not two sparrows sold for a farthing? and one of them shall not fall to the ground without your father: That is, without your father's knowledge and permission.* After that, our Saviour tells them, that *the very hairs of their head are all numbred.*

IT is very certain, that God Almighty's governing and over-ruling Providence is not so frequently or glaringly conspicuous, nor imprest upon our understandings with such irresistible power in our days, as in the first ages of the world, and before God Almighty had by *Moses* and the Prophets, and lastly by his Son our Saviour *Jesus Christ*, made himself sufficiently known to the rational part of his Creation; yet if we who live under the Christian dispensation would properly consider and attend to the constant workings of Providence, we should often evidently discover, that God is not an unactive and unconcerned Being in the affairs of our world: Several instances of which might be given; but I shall only mention two, that is, *The Restoration of the Royal Family of the Stuarts,*

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Stuarts, wherein the hand of God most remarkably and miraculously appeared; as the design was carefully concealed from every one's knowledge, except the Principal Actors; so that the happy event was equally surprizing and unexpected. And it is morally impossible the secret could have been kept till effectually executed, if the chief Agent had not been actuated by the secret influence of a Divine Monitor. Two other remarkable ones were, The happy Deliverance of this Nation from Popery, in the year 1689, without shedding one drop of Blood: And the intended Massacre of the King and the three Estates of the Realm by Gun-Powder, on the 5th of *November*, 1605.



C H A P. III.

On GOD's Preserving Providence.

AS the story of *Moses's* Preservation is an incident miraculous, and manifestly contrived by the wisdom of God; that shall be the subject I shall first take notice of. *Pharaoh* King of *Egypt*, we are informed, took all possible measures to prevent the Children of *Israel's* increasing; and his first step for that purpose was, to
issue

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issue out his Royal command to the *Hebrew* Midwives, to destroy all the Male-Children at their birth: But this project not succeeding, (God having ordered it otherwise) he contrived another; which was, to give a strict command to all his People to drown all the Male *Hebrew* Children. Whether *Moses* was born before *Pharaoh* gave his order to the Midwives, or afterwards, I think, does not appear from the History, nor is it at all material to know; thus much we are assured of, that to avoid his being drowned by *Pharaoh's* officers, employ'd for that purpose, his Mother hid him three months in her house; but lest he should be found out (for she did not know what the supreme Governor of the world had determined about his fate) she had another contrivance to preserve his life, which indeed, to human Judgment, seemed not only a dangerous, but very unlikely one to succeed according to her wishes; but as God had the care of him, the greater the danger was, the more conspicuous was the Preserving Providence of God.

MOSES before born was, without doubt, ordained by God to be both a Deliverer of the Children of *Israel* from *Egyptian* Bondage, and likewise their Legislator; so was destined by Almighty Power to be preserved for that purpose, in defiance of all human attempts to destroy him.

I HAVE already taken notice in my Chapter on *God's Governing Providence* of his being miraculously

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culously saved from the jaws of death at his birth; so I shall now proceed to relate his escape afterwards: His Mother had indeed secreted him from *Pharaoh's* executioners for three months after his birth; after that, she fearing he might be found out if he continued in her house any longer, set herself on deep meditation to contrive some other place for his greater safety. After she had revolved this important affair some time in her mind, a sudden thought arose how to dispose of him, (but it must be confessed a very unlikely one to preserve her son *Moses*, if unerring Wisdom and Almighty Power had not interposed) which was this; To put him into an Ark of Bull-rushes; which, after having dawked or plaistered with slime and pitch, she laid in the flags by the river's brink, where (if he had not been under the immediate protection of God) he must either have been starved, or found out by *Pharaoh's* officers, and murdered; so that it is evident this thought of *Moses's* Mother was by the impulse of the Holy Spirit of God: And I make no doubt, but the same Holy Spirit influenced the heart of *Pharaoh's* Daughter, not only to go at that time to wash herself, that she might have an opportunity of finding the Ark before the Babe was perished; which she did by walking by the River's side, where the Ark was laid; on sight of which the Princess sent her Maidens that were with her to fetch it to her; and when the Ark was opened, and *Pharaoh's* Daughter saw the Child, she was so pleased with
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it as to take it for her own; notwithstanding she knew (as appears by the History) that it was a *Hebrew* Child, and that she would most certainly incur her Father King *Pharaoh's* displeasure by such a glaring act of disobedience; and might very likely be made a sacrifice herself for her compassionate regard to the Infant: For it is certain the Princess could not be ignorant that her Father King *Pharaoh* had ordered all the Male *Hebrew* Children to be destroyed. What a chain of providential concurring Causes appears here for the preservation of the important Infant!

I SHALL now make some useful reflections on the occasion, before I proceed to other evidences of God's Preserving Providence; and my observation is this, That we have in the before cited cases a clear manifestation of God's fore-knowing Power, as well as his preserving Power; and indeed, without admitting that Attribute of God's Prescience, which some are unwilling to allow him, he is made a very imperfect God. For in many cases, without a fore-knowledge of things, he could not exercise his Preserving and Governing Power. I will not take upon me to assert, that God Almighty always interposes, either by his governing or preserving Providence: I rather think it is evident he does not, but is often quite passive or permissive, and leaves the success and event of things to what we call the Course of Nature, or else to turn out according to the wise, or unwise conduct of the Agent: But though, as I said before, God does not always

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ways in his Wisdom think it proper in any extraordinary manner to interpose, it is always absolutely in his Power to do it.

I NOW proceed to take a farther view of God's Preserving Providence ; a most remarkable instance of which is the story of *Shadrach, Meshach* and *Abednego*, who were miraculously preserved from having any hurt, though they were put bound into the midst of the burning fiery furnace. And of the like nature was *Daniel's* escape, when cast into the Den of Lions ; who, though they were prevented by God's Preserving Providence from hurting *Daniel*, were left to their own savage disposition when *Daniel's* false Accusers were put amongst them, they devouring them immediately, *Dan.* iii. and vi.

THESE astonishing exercises of God's Preserving Providence, were display'd to convince the Heathens that their mighty Idols, whether made of gold, wood, or stone, were only senseless, impotent Images ; and that the God of *Shadrach, Meshach*, and *Abednego*, and also of *Daniel*, was the only living, eternal, omnipotent and true God ; and therefore only to be served and adored. And this, truly, *Darius* the King was forced to confess, after he saw him (*Daniel*) so miraculously preserved : And moreover, wrote unto all People, Nations and Languages that dwell in all the earth ; saying, I make a decree, that in every Dominion of my Kingdom, men tremble and fear before the Lord God of *Daniel* ; for he is the living God, and stedfast for ever : He delivereth
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and rescueth, and he worketh signs and wonders in heaven and in earth, who hath delivered Daniel from the power of the lions, Dan. vi. 25, 26, 27. Nor does it appear from the Historian, that *Nebuchadnezzar* was less affected by the miraculous escape of those three Persons he put into the fiery furnace; for though he did not express himself on the occasion in so sublime a manner as *Darius*, yet he proceeded so far as to make a decree equal to *Darius's*, viz. "That every Person should be cut in pieces, and their houses made a dunghil, who should speak any thing against of the God of *Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego*; because there is no other God that can deliver after this sort." Ocular demonstration convinced both these Kings of the unlimited Power of the God of *Daniel*, &c. and likewise of the impotency of their Idol Gods; though made of Gold, and threescore cubits high, as *Nebuchadnezzar's* was.

My mentioning this huge, stately Idol God, brings to my thoughts a very remarkable story from sacred writ of another monstrous Idol God, called *Dagon*, the God of the *Philistines*; which I shall relate, as it is a farther manifestation of God's all-seeing eye, and Governing Providence, beyond the common order and nature of things, whenever he in wisdom thinks fit to make use of his Power and vindicate his Honour. We are told, 1 *Sam. v.* 'That the *Philistines* having beaten the *Israelites*, took the Ark of God, and carried it to the house of *Dagon*, and set it by
their

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their Idol God *Dagon*. But the eternal, true and ever-living God, the Creator of the universe, did by no means approve of that dishonour done to that holy Depositum the Ark, &c. as will appear by the sequel of the story; for when the men of *Ashdod* rose up early on the morrow, to make a visit and pay their devotions to *Dagon*, they found him fallen down with his face to the earth before the Ark of the Lord; the humblest posture of adoration. This incident, doubtless, was very surprizing to the people of *Ashdod*; however, they set him up again: Whether he resembled a Man, Bird or Beast, we are not informed; but that he was a senseless, helpless, impotent Image, appears evidently; for the omnipotent God would not suffer his rival to remain in any other posture but prostrate before his Ark; in short, he fell down so often, that at last he lost his head and his hands; which misfortune, with the addition of a greater, that is, God Almighty's smiting them (the *Philistines*) with Emrods, which caused a deadly destruction among them, put them into a terrible fright and consternation, and withal made them sensible, that those calamities fell upon them by the Power of the God of *Israel*, and were occasioned by their keeping the Ark. They, with one consent, agreed to send it away immediately to *Israel*, that the avenging hand of God might not any longer continue heavy among them on that account.

THIS

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THIS signal instance of the Power of the God of *Israel*, of his Governing and Preserving Providence, and of the clear conviction that their Idol was nothing in the world, had not that proper influence and effect it ought to have had, either on the Heathens or the Children of *Israel*; for they were both so infatuated with the wiles of the Devil, and withal so habituated to their Idol worship, that all the miracles wrought by the ever-living and true God, could not even cure the Children of *Israel* wholly of their Idolatry, till after their *Babylonian* captivity; notwithstanding God Almighty had for several hundred years manifested himself to them in so peculiar a manner, and moreover had given them Laws and Ordinances to walk by, as a direction to them to pay him an acceptable worship. They had daily instances of his Governing and Preserving Providence: He told them in plain terms, if they were obedient to his Laws, they should be prosperous; if not, that they should be afflicted; and they found by experience that he was a God of truth.

IF we consider how miraculously the Sacred Writings have been preserved for many hundred years down to this time, without any material loss or corruption, notwithstanding the utmost efforts and endeavours both of *Jews* and *Gentiles* to destroy them, we must allow that God Almighty's preserving power has been manifestly the occasion of it; and that no human art, care, and industry, could have been able to have secured

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cured them, without an omnipotent Agent's aid and assistance.

I SHALL now proceed to confirm undeniably the truth of a Preserving Providence over us, if we are worthy of it; which consideration will make it our indispensable duty to pray to the Author of all good things, that his fatherly care may be over us; and of this, a King, and an inspired writer, has set us a noble pattern, which I shall deliver in his own words; who said, *Preserve me, O God; for in Thee do I put my trust, Psalm xvi. 1. Again; The Lord is my rock and my fortress, and my deliverer: My God, my strength, (or my rock) in whom I will trust; my buckler, the horn of my salvation, and my high tower. I will call upon the Lord, who is worthy to be praised: so shall I be safe from my enemies. In my distress I called upon the Lord, and cried unto my God: He heard my voice out of his Temple, and my cry came before him, even into his ears: He delivered me from my strong enemy, and from them which hated me; for they were too mighty for me. The Lord liveth, and blessed be my rock; and let the God of my salvation be exalted. It is God that avengeth me, and subdueth the people under me. He delivereth me from my enemies. Yea, thou liftest me up above those that rise up against me: Thou hast delivered me from the violent man. Therefore I will give thanks unto Thee, O Lord, among the heathen, and sing praises unto thy name. Psalm xviii. 2, 3, 6, 17, 46, and 47 verses. I sought the Lord, and he heard me, and delivered*

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me out of all my fears, Psal. xxxiv. 4. For I will not trust in my bow, neither shall my sword save me: But thou hast saved us from our enemies, and hast put them to shame that hated us, Psalm xliv. 6, 7. Why boastest thou thyself in mischief, O mighty man? The goodness of God endureth continually, Psal. liii. 1. O bless our God, ye people; and make the voice of his praise to be heard: Which holdeth our soul in life, and suffereth not our feet to be moved, Psal. lxvi. 8, 9. Then cried they unto the Lord in their trouble, and he delivered them out of their distresses. O that men would praise the Lord for his goodness, and for his wonderful works to the children of men! Psal. cvii. 6, 8. Deliver me, O Lord, from the evil man: preserve me from the violent man, Psal. xl. 1.

THE quotations I have already produced from the Royal Psalmist, are sufficient to discover his real sentiments of God's Governing and Preserving Providence; which were not merely speculative, for he had experienced both in a very high measure; as doth manifestly appear from his own mouth in sundry places. With what pathetic and importunate expressions did he pour out his soul to his God, to deprecate his Judgments: saying, *O Lord, rebuke me not in thine anger, neither chasten me in thy hot displeasure. My soul is also sore vexed: but thou, O Lord, how long? Return, O Lord; deliver my soul: O save me for thy mercies sake, Psalm viii. My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me? why art thou so far from helping me, and from the*

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the words of my roaring? O my God, I cry in the day-time, but thou hearest not; and in the night-season, and am not silent, Psalm xxii. Give ear to my prayer, O God; and hide not thyself from my supplication: attend unto me, and bear me: I mourn in my complaint, and make a noise, Psalm lv. &c. See also Psalm li.

HAVING now taken sufficient notice of the overflowings of the Prophet's heart towards his God, on the account of God's Judgments upon him for his sins; I shall proceed in the next place to shew with what exultation of joy, with what ardour of soul, with what unbounded expressions of gratitude, he manifested his exalted sense of God Almighty's Preserving Providence towards him, in delivering him out of all his troubles. *Rejoice in the Lord, O ye righteous, for praise is comely for the upright. Praise the Lord with the harp: Sing unto him with the psaltery, and an instrument of ten strings, Psalm xxxiii. I will bless the Lord at all times, his praise shall continually be in my mouth; my soul shall make her boast in the Lord: O magnify the Lord with me, and let us exalt his name together. I sought the Lord, and he heard me, and delivered me from all my fears, Psal. xxxiv. O sing unto the Lord a new song; sing unto the Lord all the earth; sing unto the Lord; bless his name; shew forth his salvation from day to day, Psal. xcvi. Bless the Lord, O my soul, and all that is within me, bless his holy name: Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits; who forgiveth all thine iniquities:*

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who healeth all thy diseases, Psal. ciii. O give thanks unto the Lord, for he is good: for his mercy endureth for ever, &c. Psal. cxxxvi. O Lord my God, I cried unto thee, and thou hast healed me. Sing unto the Lord, O ye saints of his, and give thanks at the remembrance of his holiness: for his anger endureth but a moment. Thou hast turned for me my mourning into dancing. Thou hast put off my sackcloth, and girded me with gladness, to the end that my tongue (or my soul) may sing praises to thee, and not be silent. O Lord my God, I will give thanks to thee for ever.

HAVING already laid before my Reader a large specimen of the holy Pen-man's faith in God, and his Providence, for the rest I must refer to his works, which are worthy of the highest regard, and deserving the daily reading them with all possible attention; where we shall find the Psalmist has not only elegantly display'd the Wisdom of God in the Creation, but likewise his divine Attributes, and Providential Dispensations in the world; he has remarked with great accuracy all such incidents, events, and extraordinary occurrences, contrary to the course of nature; and that whenever such things happened, they were brought about for some wise end and purpose by the Author of Nature, and not attributed to blind Chance.

THE sacred Writings are indeed full of the uncommon workings of Providence, as I have shewn before; and have given some reasons why God in his Wisdom thought it necessary to make himself

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himself known in another manner than by the Works of the Creation, that his rational creatures might not be ignorant of their Creator. For Man, infatuated Man! was, after the fall, so clouded in his understanding, so corrupted in his heart, as to be totally ignorant of a God, and of any duty towards him: Man was then so given up to his own vile affections, as to be quite thoughtless how the world or himself was made; and that so stupendous and astonishing a Work must be performed by an all-wise, eternal and ever-living Being.

SIN so far degraded and altered our nature from the Perfection in which it was created, as to make us stand in need of some farther light than that of reason, to give us a knowledge of God and his Providence, and how to perform an acceptable service to him; to make us sensible, that *affliction does not spring from the ground, nor trouble from the dust*; but that every event of human life comes to pass by God's appointment or permission. On this account, and out of great mercy and compassion to Mankind, our Creator made himself known to Man by degrees, as it were step by step, until the fulness of time was come, that God in his wisdom saw every thing ripe, and properly prepared, for the accomplishment and putting into execution his grand and original scheme, of sending a Saviour into the world, fully to make known his will to Mankind; which glorious and unfathomable design

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of our Redemption the Angels understood not, but were desirous to look into.

I HAVE made a little digression, but shall now go on in my intended design of giving proofs of God's Governing and Preserving Providence: The notorious instances of it are endless, so I shall conclude with *one*, very astonishing and wonderful; it is the story of *Elijah* and *Abab*, and the Prophets of *Baal*, as recorded in *1 Kings* xvii. and xviii. which miraculous event happened on Mount *Carmel*, in the presence of King *Abab*, and all *Israel*; which affected all the People so much that *they fell on their faces, and said, The Lord he is God; The Lord he is God*; or the only true God: And indeed they might well say so, after so visible and glaring a detection of the falsity and impotency of Idol Gods, and Idol Prophets; together with the most manifest and undeniable proof of the Almighty Power of the only true God, the God of *Israel*.

THE substance of the story here followeth: *Elijah* told wicked King *Abab*, in the name of the ever-living God, that there would *neither be dew nor rain these three years*; which so much displeased *Abab*, that he would certainly have taken away his life for telling him such bad news, if God had not taken care of him, by directing him to hide himself by the Brook *Cherith*, where God appointed the Ravens to feed him with flesh and bread both morning and evening, and he drank of the Brook till it was dried up; and

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and then the Lord directed him to go to *Zarephath*, or *Sarepta*, where he was sustained by a widow Woman by a miracle; for the Woman had only *a handful of meal in a barrel, and a little oil in a cruse*, left for herself and her son, the famine being sore in the land; so that the Widow was not indeed, in point of conscience, required to support a stranger with that little she had left, and starve herself and her son: However, upon the Prophet's telling her, that if she made him a cake first, to satisfy his hunger, God, who governs the world, and can do whatever he pleases, would not let her and her son suffer by her act of charity to him, but would so order things, that neither her meal, nor her oil should waste with using, *until the day that the Lord sendeth rain on the earth*. Upon which words, and the influence of the Holy Spirit operating on her soul at the same time; she went and did as the Prophet desired; that is, baked him a cake first; believing it would happen according to his words: as it did; for the little meal and oil which the Widow seemed to think, would serve only for a meal for herself and son, lasted a whole year for three Persons.

How long it was, after *Elijah* came to the Widow, that he restored her son to life again, does not appear by the History; but it appears she did not find him out to be a Prophet, or *the Man of God*, till he had brought the child down to her alive: But one must reasonably believe it was done the first time that *Elijah* came

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to her, and before she had baked a cake for him; for upon once using her meal and oil, of which (according to her own account) she had so little, she must immediately discover its not wasting; and consequently, that the Person who told her neither the meal nor oil should diminish upon using until, &c. must be a Prophet, or Man of God.

BUT to proceed; The Providence of God so ordered matters, that before the famine ceased in *Samaria*, *Elijah* and *Ahab* had an interview; at which *Ahab* said to him, *Art thou he that troubleth Israel?* To which the Prophet made answer; *I have not troubled Israel, but thou and thy father's house; in that ye have forsaken the commandments of the Lord, and thou hast followed Baalim.* After which, the Prophet boldly gave *Ahab* a challenge to bring his whole posse of *Baalim's* Prophets to *Mount Carmel*, in order to make a publick trial before all the children of *Israel*, whether the Lord *Jehovah* be the true God, or *Baal*; that the children of *Israel* might not any longer halt between two opinions: but that it might incontestably be discovered, which was the true and ever-living God; in short, *Elijah's* experiment was agreed to, and tried; what that was, may be seen in *1 Kings xviii.* and notwithstanding there were *eight hundred and fifty* of *Baal's* Prophets to *one* of the Lord's the God of *Abraham*, of *Isaac*, and of *Israel*; yet this single Prophet *Elijah*, having the assistance of the Creator of the world, proved by an evident miracle

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cle (which all *Baal's* Prophets were not able to perform, they having the liberty of making the first trial) that his (*Elijah's*) God, was the true God; upon which all the People *acknowledged the Lord to be God, and fell on their faces*, as hath been mentioned above. The conclusion of all, was this: By *Elijah's* order, all *Baal's* Prophets were brought down to the Brook *Kishon*, and there slain in the presence of *Ahab*.

IT was the Wisdom of God to make himself known in those days by such extraordinary methods; for the world was then so stupidly ignorant of the true God, and how to worship him properly, for want of some farther Revelation, for Idolatry had taken such deep root, that the Children of *Israel* could not be cured of it without the utmost pains and difficulties. But by the way I must observe, that though God's peculiar People were in general Idolaters by living so long among the *Egyptians*, they were not all so; God never left himself *without witnesses*; when the world was at the worst before the flood, there was one righteous Person in it, to propagate God's true Religion; and I shall make it appear, that in all succeeding ages, till the coming of Christ in the flesh, God always raised up some Reformers, or Preachers of Righteousness; and the nearer the world came to the appearance of the Sun of Righteousness, the greater knowledge it had in the will of God; so that one may properly say, God gradually paved the way for the reception of his last and most complete Revelation

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Revelation to Mankind by his beloved Son Jesus Christ; God sent a succession of Prophets to give notice of his Mission, some of which discovered it in such clear and intelligible terms, as to make it impossible to be misunderstood.

IN order to make good what I have hinted at before, that the scheme of Providence was to make the Heathen world acquainted with his will, though he did not directly communicate or reveal it, only to a particular nation, after he had separated them from all other nations; which was indeed absolutely necessary to do; for had they not been forbidden all converse with the Idolatrous People, they would not have submitted to the *Mosaic* Dispensation so readily as they did; for it evidently appears by *Moses's* History, that a very small matter disgusted them, and made them fall into their old way; God was forced to work miracle upon miracle to make them know that he was the true God, and to keep them to their duty, for they were a stiff-necked and rebellious People; but they were descended from those three Worthies, *Abraham*, *Isaac*, and *Jacob*, which was the reason of God's choosing them for his peculiar People; besides, the Saviour of the World was foretold to descend from one of the Tribes, which was afterwards declared to be the Tribe of *Judah*.

MANKIND, for about two thousand years, from *Adam* to *Moses*, had no Scripture or written Word, but were left to the Light of Nature, or Reason, to guide them; and for near two thousand

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and years more, till the coming of Christ, scripture was only among the People of *Israel*. However, though God Almighty did in a particular manner reveal his will by his servant *Moses* to the *Israelites*, there is no doubt to be made but the Heathen nations in process of time got some knowledge of the true God, and of the laws he had given to his chosen People, from their frequent wars with them, and by other means; namely, the miracles he wrought, both in *Egypt* and afterwards; by his extraordinary Governing and Preserving Providence; by his Judgments, and by his Mercies: All which the Heathen nations must have heard of; as evidently appears by the Psalmist: *Wherefore should the Heathen say, Where is now their God? Psal. lxxix. 10. Declare his Glory among the Heathen, his wonders among all People, Psal. xcvi. 3.* Again; *O Lord, our Lord, how excellent is thy name in all the earth! who hast set thy glory above the Heavens.*

EVERY one may be convinced, by making a Judgment about things happening in our own time, as well as what is recorded in the History of all ages, that if any very extraordinary, or supernatural incident ever fall out in any part of the known world, it is by some means or other dispersed through every nation; from whence we may conclude, that all the miraculous transactions of *Moses* and the Prophets; all the Statutes and Ordinances given by God to the Children of *Israel*, were known to the Heathen nations; and consequently, by that means, the Heathens might
come

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come to such a knowledge of the true God, and of Moral Duties, as might the better prepare them for the reception of the Messiah, and his Doctrines. And if I may be allowed to give my Judgment about the matter, not in a dogmatical, but diffident manner, it was the method God in his Wisdom thought fit to take, to bring the Heathen nations by degrees to the knowledge of himself and his will; and that the *Israelites* punishment for their sins so often by Captivity among the Heathens, might be done not only to punish them that way, (for God, whose Power is unlimited, was not confined to any particular way of correction) but likewise intended to bring those Heathen nations to the worship of the God of *Israel*; for sure I am, there subsists the same reason for the Heathen nations to learn to worship the Children of *Israel's* God, by their living amongst *Them*, as for the Children of *Israel* to learn to be *Idolaters*, by living among the *Egyptians*. Again, it must be observed, that the Punishments and Judgments, and Mercies of God towards his chosen People, were generally of so publick a nature, as if designed to reform and instruct other nations, as well as that of *Israel*.

It is the opinion of a very learned Man *, that *Moses*, or his History, gave rise to the greatest part of the Gentile Theology; what the *Gibeonites* said to *Joshua*, chap. ix. 9. in regard to their having heard of the name and fame of

* *Hewel's Demonstratio Evang.*

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the God of *Israel*, and all that he did in *Egypt*, &c. was reasonably to be believed to be a truth, though they deceived him as to other things.

AFTER *Moses*'s decease, who was Deputy, King, and Governor under God over the *Israelites*; God Almighty appointed *Joshua*, another righteous Man, to succeed *Moses* under the same commission; and he was appointed to conduct them to the promised land; for *Moses* viewed it at a distance before he died. As God was with *Moses*, so he told *Joshua* he would be with him; saying, *Be therefore strong, and of good courage*. And the first miracle God wrought, in order to convince *Joshua* and his People that he would be as good as his word, was to part the river *Jordan*, and make the waters to stand on an heap, so that *they all passed over on dry ground*. In short, they had uninterrupted success, as long as they continued to obey the Laws of God. *Joshua* was a most excellent Governor, and a very Righteous Man; he set his People a good example, by walking strictly in the Laws of *Moses*, and constantly exhorted them to do the same, and *not to turn therefrom either to the right hand or left; but to cleave unto the Lord their God*, Josh. xxiii. and xxiv.

WHEN righteous Rulers governed, the People in general were both afraid and ashamed to be otherwise; but when their Rulers were wicked and idolatrous, such was the People in general. For God never left the world wholly destitute both of Preachers and Practisers of his true Religion;

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Religion; and the nearer the world approached to that glorious period, *the fulness of time*, in which the Messiah was to appear, the greater improvement it made in the knowledge of the Will of God, and in the practice of his Laws. *Samuel, David, Solomon*, and many other good Kings and Prophets, were from time to time raised up, not only to advance natural Religion, but to foretel the coming of a Redeemer; and consequently to prepare Mens minds for a more pure and spiritual worship, and to give a finishing stroke to God's preparatory scheme for Man's Redemption. He sent last of all *John the Baptist*, to preach up Repentance, *because the kingdom of heaven was at hand; to prepare the way of the Lord, and make his paths straight; to baptize, and preach the baptism of repentance for the remission of sins*: To let them know, there would soon come *one mightier than he; the latchet of whose shoes he was not worthy to stoop down and unloose*: And that he (the Baptist) only baptized them with water, but he that is to come shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost. As the several Predictions of Christ, his Church, and Kingdom by the Psalmist, particularly in *Psalms 2, 22, 45, 93, and 110.* and in the whole *Song of Solomon*, and likewise by the Prophets *Isaiab, Jeremiab, Hosea, Daniel, Micah, Zechariab, and Malachi*, may be had recourse to in the Bible, I think it better to refer the Reader to the several Authors, if there be occasion, than to copy out their several Predictions. But as Prophecies

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phies are not all of them intended to be understood till after their accomplishment, so even some of those relating to the Messiah were not clearly intelligible till after his appearance in the flesh; and even then the *Jews* would not allow him to be the Person foretold, because he did not make that grand and pompous appearance they expected, though without any grounds or reasons for such vain expectations, because none of the Prophets represented him in such a light, but quite the contrary.

I HAVE now brought to a crisis the views I had in delineating God Almighty's Governing and Preserving Providence over the world; and likewise in delineating God Almighty's gradual scheme of Man's Redemption, from *Adam's* fall to the fulness of time, the Birth of Jesus Christ. The first notice God thought fit to give of this his intention, was immediately after the fall; which was only a general promise that *the seed of the Woman should bruise the Serpent's head, &c.* Two thousand years after this, God was pleased to be more clear about the matter; which was upon the call of *Abraham* from his own country, and to him then was communicated God's intention that the Messiah should descend from his (*Abraham's*) loins, by saying, *That in his seed all the nations of the earth should be blessed.* Two hundred and thirty years after this Promise to *Abraham*, God made a farther Revelation about the Messiah, by declaring from what particular Tribe he was to descend, which was the Tribe of *Judah*;

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Judah; and lastly, God Almighty discovered the particular Family the Messiah was to descend from, which was *David's*. About two hundred years after *David's* time, several other Prophets, whose names I have mentioned before, spake particularly about the Messiah; as of his flying into *Egypt*, the place of his Birth, &c.

To sum up all in a few words; All the holy Men, *the sons of God*, the Posterity of *Abel*, (for *Cain's* Posterity was distinguished by God under the title of *the sons of men*) which are mentioned in the Old Testament, and likewise the People of *Israel*, were all raised up by God, and placed in the view of the whole world, to proclaim God's Power, and make his true Religion known to all the Heathen countries round about; *As I live, all the earth shall be full of the glory of the Lord*, Numb. iv. 21. Again; *The path of the just is as the shining light, that shineth more and more unto the perfect day*, Prov. iv. 18. by which expression I conceive *Solomon* thought, or rather knew by the Spirit of God, that God Almighty's intentions were, to make his Will known to perfection at last; that is, *in the fulness of time*: which was strictly accomplished by the Appearance of our Lord Jesus Christ in the flesh.

I CONFESS it will be a digression from my proposed subject; however, before I enter on the subject of my next Chapter, I must take some notice of that worthy Gentile, *Job*, (for I must believe there was such a Person) whose shining Character was this, *That he was upright and perfect,*

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perfect, and one that feared God, and eschewed evil; so that doubtless he was a great instrument in the hand of God, of propagating true Religion amongst his Gentile Brethren. And by his History it evidently appears his Reason was assisted by some extraordinary illumination. He was not like our modern Gentiles, who profanely deride the Wisdom, Justice, Goodness, and Power of God; and only because God doth not give an account to them of the Reason of his Doings. Job acknowledged that God was wise in heart, and mighty in strength; saying, *Who hath hardened himself against him, and hath prospered?* Job ix. What Job said to his three friends in great derision, may, with great justice, be replied to the Free-thinkers in our times: "No doubt but ye are the People, and Wisdom shall die with you." chap. xii. 2. Again; "Shall any teach God knowledge? seeing he judgeth those that are high." chap. xxi. 22. "Touching the Almighty, we cannot find him out: He is excellent in power and in judgment, and in plenty of justice: He will not afflict. Men do therefore fear him. He respecteth not any that are wise of heart." Job xxxvii. 23, 24.

Job, who was a much wiser Man than any of our Free-thinkers, acknowledged that he had uttered things that he understood not; things too wonderful for him, that he knew not: Wherefore, saith he, *I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes. Behold, I am vile; what shall I answer thee? I will lay my hand upon my mouth, &c.*

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I know thou canst do every thing, and that no thought can be withholden from thee. chap. xlii. 2.

The submissive, penitential expressions above, were uttered by *Job* after God had expostulated with him the second time, and convinced him of his (God's) Righteousness, Power, and Wisdom. *Job* indeed might well be silenced, and lay his hand on his mouth, when God required him to answer, or *make him know* (as it is in the margin) *where he (Job) was, when God laid the foundation of the earth? or who hath laid the measures thereof? or who hath stretched the line upon it? Whereupon are the foundations thereof fastened? or who laid the corner-stone thereof? Shall he that contendeth with the Almighty instruct him? He that reproveth God, let him answer it.* Job xxxviii, xxxix, xl.

THESE, and many other texts of the same import, not only in the Book of *Job*, but in many other of the sacred Writings, ought to be an instructive Lesson to all profane Wits, who take upon them to censure the Wisdom and Conduct of God in his providential dispensations. O vain! O wretched and insolent Man! to think thyself wiser than the Creator of the World! *Hardly do we guess aright at things that are upon the earth, and with labour do we find the things that are before us: But the things that are in heaven who hath searched out? Wisd. ix. 16. Who can find out God to Perfection?*

I CANNOT part with God Almighty's faithful servant *Job*, without taking particular notice
of

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of those expressions of his, which evidently discovered his knowledge of a Redeemer, and of the Resurrection of the Body; in which he seemed very justly to comfort himself, when under the afflicting hand of God, and the severe reproaches of his three Friends and his Wife; in the assurance that his troubles would have an end in this World, and that he should live for ever in another, and be happy. His words are these; viz. *For I know that my Redeemer liveth, and that I shall stand at the last day upon the earth: And though after my skin, worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God; or, (as it is in the margin) after I shall awake, though this body be destroyed, yet out of my flesh shall I see God: whom I shall see for myself, and mine eyes shall behold, and not another; though my reins be consumed within me.* Job xix. 25, 26, 27. See also chap. xxi. 30.

I AM equally sensible of, and surprized at some learned Mens endeavouring to force and explain away the literal sense of the texts before mentioned; it is very extraordinary, to make obscurity in words where there is none; and where indeed I see no reason for departing from the literal sense. I am sorry to say it is too often the case with many other texts of the sacred Writings; which occasions many Heresies, and many unnecessary disputes among Christians, and is attended with many ill consequences to the Christian Religion; by making many Sects of Christians, and many no Christians. It is

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very likely *Job* was a Prophet, as some learned Men think, because he was so supernaturally illuminated with regard to a Redeemer and a Resurrection : So much is certain, that he was a favourite of God Almighty's, by what God said to *Eliphaz the Temanite* ; *My wrath is kindled against thee and thy two friends; for ye have not spoken of me the thing that is right, as my servant Job hath, &c.* Job xlii. 7, 8, 9, 10.





ESSAYS

In Proof of

CHRISTIANITY.

CHAP. III.

HAVING in my first Chapter endeavoured from Reason and Scripture to demonstrate the Certainty of the Being of a GOD; and in my second Chapter having likewise evinced from various facts in the sacred Writings, and also from our own Observation, and Reason, when properly made use of, the undoubted Certainty of God's Governing and Preserving Providence over the World; and moreover, having considered the state of the World in regard to Religion, from the Fall to the Deluge, and from the Deluge to *Abraham's* Call, and so on to *Moses* and the Prophets; I am now come to

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consider

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consider that joyful and happy period, which was stiled *the perfect day*, and *fulnefs of time*, in which our Redeemer appeared in the *flesh*, to make known clearly to us the Will of his Father; which in a few years made a most astonishing progress throughout the then known World, only by the Preaching and Miracles of Jesus Christ and twelve of his Disciples; all illiterate Men, incapable of art or violence: So that nothing can be a greater mark and evidence of the Doctrines being from God, (exclusive of the Miracles wrought to give a sanction to them) than their marvellous Effects. But this Religion of Christ's did not continue long in its original Purity, before it was corrupted by various Heresies, and consequently made various Sects in Christianity, who went under the several names of the founders; which divisions in the Church have occasioned some to turn Deists, and some Atheists: I am sorry to say the numbers of the first are in these our days much increasing; for Men are now so much wiser than their Forefathers, as to be able to make a better Religion than what God has given them.

I DARE appeal to every Deist's and Infidel's conscience, (if he will have so much honour as to own the truth) whether he would reject the Gospel with all the Mysteries attending it, if it gave indulgence to mankind to follow their sensual appetites and worldly interest with impunity? For it is most certainly not the want of sufficient Evidence, as they pretend, (because there can be
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no better for the truth of any thing transacted so many years ago) is the true cause of the violent opposition made to the Gospel Revelation; but the strictness and purity of its Doctrines, quite contrary to the general Genius of the world. The belief of the Gospel truths depends very much on the disposition Men are in to receive them: If the heart be well affected towards them, they will then find easy Admittance: And the truth of this, the Oracle of all truth has confirmed, by saying, *If any man will do God's will, he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God, or whether I speak of myself.* John vii. 17.

I WILL be bold to say, The light of unassisted Reason could never give Mankind such an absolute perfect system of Doctrine and Rule of Life, as has been revealed to Mankind by Jesus Christ; which must convince every unprejudiced person, the Author of it was more than human: And I may defy any Infidel, Deist, or Free-thinker, to prove that the World was as little wicked, and understood all moral duties as well, when under the Light of Nature or Reason only, as it has been since a Revelation of God's will was given or made to us. Again; I do affirm, That he who has both the light of Reason and Scripture to direct him, is undoubtedly more secure from error, than he who has only the light of Reason for his guide. Divine Revelation must be highly assistant to Reason, without taking away the strength that Reason

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had; and does not propose any thing as a duty, that is contrary to unbiaſſed Reason. What then can be the reason of the Wiſe Free-thinkers being ſo enraged againſt a Revelation that is ſo very ſerviceable to the Light of Nature? and in particular to ſuch as God Almighty has given but a ſmall ſhare of Reason; which I may venture to ſay, takes in far the greateſt part of the world. If I am told my duty in plain terms by unerring Wiſdom, is it not much eaſier for me, than if I was obliged to find it out by deep thought and attention; which not one in a thouſand is capable of? Can any thing then be more abſurd and ſenſeleſs, than to urge Reason againſt Revelation, in ſuch caſes where all the light of the former muſt be borrowed from the latter? Notwithſtanding this is really the caſe, the Infidels are ſo hardened, as loudly to cry up the Sufficiency of Reason, when they make no better uſe of it, than to employ it, firſt to depoſe Faith, and then to ſerve their Luſts and Interests.

ANOTHER very important reaſon may be aſſigned for Jeſus Chriſt the Son of God his coming into the world, beſides that of informing us of our duty to God, and of a Reſurrection to life eternal, of happineſs or miſery, which we could not diſcover with certainty by the Light of Nature; I mean, that of his dying to make ſatiſfaction to his Father for the ſins of the whole world, and of his being our Mediator and Advocate with God; which no creature could have
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any right or pretence to ; for nothing less than the Son of God could merit any thing of his Creator ; and by sad experience of the strength of our nature in its greatest purity, it appears it was too difficult for us to perform such conditions, as would become the Wisdom, Holiness, and Majesty of God to prescribe : Our happiness could no other way be provided for than by the Suffering and Mediation of some Person who could offer unto God an equivalent for our offences, satisfy his justice, and intercede for the acceptance of such an obedience, as we were capable of performing under the frailties and infirmities of our nature ; and since this is the case, that we have great occasion for such a Friend as aforesaid, no less Person than the Son of God was fit, and of consequence and dignity enough to do all this for us.

BUT this I must confess is too large a field for my Meditations at this time, and a part of Revelation I did not propose making the subject of my *Essays*, which were primarily intended only to evince the Truth and Reasonableness of the Revelation we have received from God, so far only as it respects all moral and positive duties, and informs us clearly of the whole will of God ; which, in my opinion, we should have been in a great measure ignorant of, if God had not been pleased to give us this Revelation which I have impartially and carefully considered, and do stedfastly believe from many observations I have made, it cannot possibly be any human

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human production. If one crafty Priest, or a confederacy of crafty Priests had been concerned in writing so much of the Bible as treats of natural and revealed Religion, I verily perswade myself he or they would have done it with more art and refined policy, so as it might have appeared in a different light as to many things in it, to what it does now. There is evidently a spirit of undisguised Truth, Purity, and Simplicity runs through the Book, not to be found in any other History; which fully convinces me of its divine original: We find no crime, no frailty, either concealed or mitigated of any Person whose name there is occasion to mention; which if it had not been done so, would have put the profane Infidels to a terrible loss for materials to employ their wit upon: By which means, more than by strength of argument, the Unbelievers have indeed gained many disciples; for with weak and corrupt minds, a vile Joke has a greater influence than the sublimest Reasoning. There is nothing so easy to do, and nothing much more criminal in the sight of God than *ludere cum sacris*, to sport with and deride holy things. And as the Free-thinkers, I am very sure, cannot prove that the Bible was not dictated by the Spirit of God, I must advise them, for their own sake, not to take such a freedom with it, lest they find themselves under an irrecoverable mistake at last: God will not be mocked; therefore it is much safer, if they will not believe, not to scoff at the word of God. No system
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of Morality and Religion was ever produced any way equal to the Christian Revelation. But we are told there are mysteries in it, and they cannot prevail on themselves to believe what they do not understand. This is the plea they think proper to make use of; for they would willingly be thought to act rationally. We allow there are mysteries above our understanding; what then? Since no argument can prove them impossible, and they are declared and made known to us by clear Revelation, they ought to be believed.*

HE that will not believe what is proposed on reasonable, though but probable motives, would not even yield to demonstration, if the truth opposed his lusts and passions; and this is the reason that they seldom or never consider the arguments recommending or enforcing the truth of Christianity: The Deists indeed, for decency's sake, cry up Morality and Virtue at a great rate, and but few of them practice either; so that their design manifestly tends to make inroads upon Faith with a better grace, whereby Scripture is struck at, which is the only sure and solid foundation both of Faith and Morality, and real Virtue: For what will become of all moral Virtues, &c. when the Bible is depreciated and ridiculed as a Fable. Natural Religion will then be what every one pleases, when the standard of true Religion is destroy'd.

* DR CLARKE on the Trinity.

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IN my way of thinking, if the Bible had been the invention of meer crafty, political Men, they would have considered that Mysteries in their doctrines would have hindered their being so well received by the world, which we now find to be the case, and made the pretended objection against the truth of the Christian Religion, and for that reason they would have been too cunning to have foisted in Mysteries to nip their whole scheme in the bud; and this is to me a most convincing argument alone, if there were no other, that the Bible was not any human invention, but brought to us from heaven, by the Son of God, and the dictates of his Holy Spirit; and for that reason we must believe the Mysteries of the Gospel, though our capacities are not at present enlarged enough to comprehend them: Faith, and good Works, are made the terms of our Salvation: Therefore since God is undoubtedly the Author of our holy Religion, and not Man; and He, as our Creator and Governor, has an indisputable right to act as He pleases; it is the indispensable duty of all his creatures that live under the Christian dispensation, to receive it with all its Mysteries, which are given us for a trial of our Faith; for where a thing is clear, there is not so much room for Faith.

RELIGION was from the creation believed in the world; therefore it must be either Natural, or by Revelation: They are both the Law and Will of God; though one is manifested to us by the exercise of our reasoning Powers, the other
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by divine Revelation; which last I shall have occasion to enlarge upon afterwards: But in the mean time, I must add a few words to make it appear that the Law of Nature dictates the worship of God as a duty to every one that believes there is such a Being; because by the same Faith whereby we speculatively believe the Being of a God, we must likewise necessarily believe He is to be adored, served and loved: The reasons for it are obvious; for if in our dealings with our fellow creatures we think ourselves in point of gratitude obliged to reverence and respect our Benefactors, and serve them whenever it is in our power; is it not much more reasonable, and indeed our bounden duty, that we should daily reverence, adore, worship and serve that Being who created us, and by whose good Providence we are preserved, and have the enjoyment of the good things of this world; and in whose power it is instantly to annihilate us, or make us miserable in this world for many years, and in the next to all eternity, (if he please) without doing us any injustice? For who can say to God, *I am clean, I am free from all iniquity?* If we are thankful to our earthly Benefactors for their kindnesses and favours done us, how much more ought we to be so to our heavenly Benefactor, *in whom we live, and move, and have our Being?*

I THINK it would be superfluous to say a great deal to prove the religious worship of God to be both a natural and revealed duty; so that
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whoever neglects it, acts in opposition to both, and must certainly be accountable to God for such omission: And I must freely tell my fellow creatures, that I am so absolutely convinced that public and private Prayer, Thanks and Praises to our Creator, was expected and required by him as a natural duty, before it was a positive one, that I do neither think it criminal or uncharitable to suspect, that all those who totally neglect this duty are actually Atheists, and say in their heart *There is no God*: For there are but few who are hardy enough to make public such sentiments, except among those in their own way of thinking. Both Mr. *Hobbes*, and the Author of *Christianity as old as the Creation* agree, that public and private Prayer is a duty to God.

To advance a little nearer to evince the truth and necessity of a Revelation; the Deists, I think, admit there is such a thing as moral Good and Evil; if so, I presume they will allow moral Good to be, the making their thoughts, words and actions subservient and conformable to the right and unbiaſſed Reason of things; then moral Evil must be just the reverse of it. But now the great difficulty will be how to go to work without the assistance of a Revelation, to make a certain and unerring discovery of all moral duties according to this standard; or how to prevail on ourselves to observe them when discovered, if they happen to interfere with our worldly interest, or our sensual enjoyments; for
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in these two cases, I much suspect, if we had any scruples about some particular things when they did not conveniently lie in our way to take possession of them; we should find it no difficult matter to get rid of our qualms of Conscience, when they did, and would be agreeable to us; we should then be apt to think ourselves in an error about our scruples, and that in reality the action was not immoral or criminal, and that every one must have an undoubted right to make himself easy and happy when in his power. Now this cannot be the case, when we have the whole Will of God laid before us, as in the Scriptures; we are no longer left to our Reason to find out our duty; but we are told in plain terms by the Spirit of God, what is good and what is evil; what we are to do, and what we are not to do: Now without such a Revelation as this, which it has pleased God to give us of his Will by *Moses* and the Prophets, and last of all by his Son Jesus Christ, I do absolutely deny the possibility of knowing our whole duty as clearly as we do now, to God, our neighbour, and ourselves.

I WILL give an instance or two out of many that might be brought to confirm the truth of my assertion, that the Religion of Nature was not a sufficient light, after Man's first transgression, to guide him in the way of Righteousness; I mean, in regard to that immoral practice of Fornication, which I presume was not discovered to be a sin, till it was expressly forbidden by
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the revealed Laws of God. In the infancy of the world, Fornication was indeed unavoidable, because without that liberty the World could not have been sufficiently peopled in a proper time, unless God Almighty had made millions of Pairs at first, instead of one Pair: But as God in his wisdom did not think fit to do that, He permitted Polygamy and Concubines for some time, without any express command to the contrary; express, or clear command, I say, to the contrary; for God's instituting Matrimony after He had made Man and Woman, was in reality a discovery that Fornication would be no longer allowable than the necessity of the thing required; according to the old saying, "Necessity has no Law."

I AM now to prove Fornication not only to be a plain prohibited sin by the Revealed Will of God, as appears evidently by various texts in the Old and New Testament, but also to be a moral Evil. Whatever interferes (if universally practised) with the general peace and happiness of Mankind, must confessedly be contrary to the Laws of Nature and right Reason: Now in this case every individual has an equal right most certainly to gratify his senses; and, we must suppose, more or less, an inclination to do it; so that, consequently, the practice of Fornication in the world would be universal, whilst there was no law to hinder it; would not then such practices produce most dreadful Evils and Miseries in the world? What then all Men can't
do,

do, without destroying the peace and happiness of the community, cannot in the Reason of things be lawful for any one to do. Which must manifestly demonstrate Fornication to be a moral Evil; and consequently, a Sin within the light of natural Religion, when well considered and attended to; but as there is in the nature of Man such a propensity towards that vice, it was necessary there should be a clearer law to forbid it, than that of our Reason. The same may be determined about Drunkenness, &c. What I have said here, is to shew the necessity of a clear Revelation of the Will of God; which, blessed be God, we are now in possession of; because many Immoralities were not sufficiently discovered by the light of Nature; but now we have no cloke for our sins; for God has told us by his Son and Holy Spirit what we must do, and what we must not do, at our peril.

AGAIN; I shall make the necessity of a Revelation of the Will of God farther appear, by giving an account of the surprizing ignorance of the Heathens of old, (and we have no reason to suspect, but They had as great a share of the light of Nature as our modern Heathens) who were taught to believe it a duty to their gods to offer human sacrifices to them, and withal, such sacrifices as were most unnatural, that is to say, their Sons and their Daughters: The Psalmist calls it properly, *offering their sons and their daughters unto devils.*

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LET us next enquire how it came about, that these Heathens should likewise worship Deities that were the greatest monsters of uncleanness and iniquity that were ever heard of; and Deities that enjoined the practice of the most monstrous Impurities, and Lewdnesses, as necessary Rites to be performed in their very Temples: Once more; How came it about that *Caligula* committed Incest with his Sisters? or that *Agrippina* poisoned her Husband *Claudius*, and *Nero* his Mother *Agrippina*, &c? Was it not evidently from some defect in the light of Nature, to guide Mankind, after the fall, in the way of Righteousness? How then can the Deists or Free-thinkers have the assurance to assert, that the light of Nature is sufficient to inform us how to please God, without any other Revelation? The God of the Christians has taught us quite another lesson; if Men are wicked, after a clear Revelation of God's Will, they act contrary to knowledge, so cannot plead ignorance, as they might have done in the state of Nature. Saint *Paul* told the *Ephesians*, in his Epistle to them, that when *they were Gentiles in the flesh, they were without hope, and without God in the world*; that is, without any knowledge of the true God, and how properly to worship and serve him: And, to use his own words in another place, he told them, *they were sometimes darkness, but now, (now ye are turned from Gentilism to Christianity) ye are light in the Lord: Therefore, put off the old man, which is corrupted according to the*

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the deceitful lusts, and put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness. By the *old man*, he meant the Gentile or Heathen corruptions, and vile wickednesses, such as has been before taken notice of. For the God whom St Paul was to teach them to worship, was a God of infinite Perfection and Purity, therefore they must endeavour to imitate him in true Holiness, and not worship him in such a beastly and abominable manner as they did their Heathen Deities; but *in spirit and in truth.*

I AM aware it will be told me, in answer to those instances I have brought to prove the want of a Revelation of the Will of God, before we had it in that perfection it came to us from the Son of God; that Men are guilty of the same heinous crimes under the light of the Gospel, as before it. I own, they have, of some of them, but not of all; nor so frequently of any of them: Besides, the Gentiles committed them, as one may reasonably believe, without any sense of their being crimes, but justifiably, many of them being recommended, or enjoined by their Gods; but we Christians *have not so learned Christ.*

WE have now seen how low the Heathen Morality and their sense of Virtue ran, till it was refined and perfected by a Revelation of God's Will; the wisest and most thinking of the Gentiles, thought they wanted it before they had it; but our wiser modern Gentiles, now they have it, pretend there was no need of it, the light of

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Reason being sufficient without it : When, alas ! they would not be half so wise as they are now, even in regard to Moral Duties only, without the aid of a Revelation. This is truth, though not for the advantage of their cause to own it ; every thing when discovered, seems then so obvious and easy to our understandings, that we are apt to think them clear deductions from natural Reason ; but here our Judgments impose upon us, for the law of Nature was so corrupted after the fall, and the knowledge of it lost to such a degree among Men, that we could not have known many things with such certainty, if Revelation had not come to our assistance ; so that the world would have been in a most deplorable condition at this time.

HOWEVER, for once I will suppose that what Revelation has discovered to us, might, as far as Moral Duties go, have been discovered by the light of Reason, when attended to ; What great service would it have been of towards reforming Mankind ? For there is a wide difference between making a thing our duty, barely from reasoning about it, and the same thing being enforced by proper authority, with the sanctions of Rewards and Punishments annexed to the performance or omission of it : And this is my reason for it, because bare judgment or opinion about a thing will be very liable to change, when either pleasure or profit interposes. But the case is quite altered, when the same thing is made our duty by a divine command ; there is then

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no room for hesitating about it, nor colour for disobedience: It is a comfortable thing to have right reason confirmed and strengthened by Divine Wisdom: But it is much more so, to have God Almighty's will revealed to us, where our reason could not possibly have given us a knowledge of it without a Revelation; of all this, I am fully convinced, and so I think must every candid and unprejudiced Person be; and must agree, that without a supernatural illumination to every individual, we could never have known how to serve and please God, without such a Revelation of his will as He has been pleased in the fulness of time to give us.

Now as the Christian Religion is in most things agreeable to our natural reason, and in the mysterious part of it not contrary to reason, nor impossible in the nature of the thing, therefore the Christian Religion is the proper object of our faith and practice. The doctrine of the Trinity in unity is what our modern Infidels cannot digest, for nothing will go down with them but what they can comprehend by their reason; now as we assert the Authority of it to be from God, unless they can make the contrary appear, they ought to be silent and give it up: But they say it is an absurd doctrine, so cannot be from God: How will these wise men make out the absurdity of it, unless they understood the nature of God? Many things may certainly be true, though we cannot comprehend them: All must allow God

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to be an incomprehensible Being, and we can know no more of Him than what is in scripture delivered concerning him: whilst we are in this world, we can never understand the state of the next so fully as we shall do when we arrive there: Therefore we must live here by faith in regard to things above our understandings; which there must be, unless the nature of the things, or our own nature were different from what it is.

HAVING now given my own opinion concerning the mysteries of Christianity, I shall lay before my Readers the sentiments of some wise and learned men on the same subject; and begin with *Descartes*, a Philosopher in much repute at the University of *Cambridge* in my time, who gives his Readers this caution: "That they should remember that God is infinite, and we ourselves finite; and therefore if He reveals any thing of Himself, or other things that are above the strength of our natural Reason, such as the mysteries of the Incarnation and the Trinity, we must not deny them credit, though we cannot clearly understand them; nor should we at all wonder that there are many things, both in his immense nature, and in the creation, that exceed our capacities." *Princ. Philos.* Part I. Art. 24.

. AGAIN; Hear the opinion of another learned Author on the subject of the Trinity, Who
says,

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says, "That a Trinity of Persons is not to be proved by natural Reason; and he that attempts to do it, does a double prejudice to the Faith: First, he derogates from its dignity; it being proper for the doctrine of Faith to be of such things as exceeds Man's Reason: Secondly, he hinders others from embracing the Faith, by using such arguments as are not cogent, which renders it obnoxious to the Infidel's contempt. It is plain Scripture, that the *Father* is *God*, the *Son* is *God*, and that the *Holy Ghost* is *God*; and that these *three* are but *one God*. And let us not go beyond the Scripture; for other subtilties and curious enquiries, besides the written Word, will do no service to the Christian Religion; when Philosophy is carried beyond its proper limits, that is, when it attempts to determine of such things as fall not under the cognizance of natural Reason, such as those that belong to the Worship of God, and Man's Salvation; but in the points of Justification, Reconciliation with God, and other matters of Faith, that are above our Reason; in these cases, I say, Revelation must be our only guide." AQUINAS, Part I. q. 32. 2. 1.

ONE more quotation on the occasion, and I have done; which will be from St *Austin*, who has the following words; "What we understand, we owe to Reason. But what we believe, we owe to authority. It is essential to a Christian Faith, that in its assent, it relies upon the infallible veracity of the Revealer. Hear,

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O ye Infidels, and tremble? what our blessed Saviour saith; *If ye BELIEVE NOT that I am HE, ye shall die in your sins.*"

I ENTIRELY agree in my sentiments with these judicious Authors; for as there is all the evidence that can be given, or that can be expected, of the scriptures being the Word of God, they most certainly ought to command both our Faith and Practice; but if Infidels offer arguments against the belief of any mysterious scripture doctrine, we are then under an obligation of defending the doctrine in the best manner we can; and the finishing stroke against them in this case, is to prove the doctrine came from God; and for that Reason we must believe it: And this we are able to do against the subtlest adversaries of Christianity, as far as any thing at such a distance of time can be proved.

SOME make objections against the truth of Christianity in general, because there are disputes among Christians about the meaning of several texts; but this carries no weight with it at all, but is quite trifling, and hardly deserves an answer; however, I will bring Scripture to give the answer, which tells us, there were and must be *Heresies*, and that *some will depart from the Faith*; and that *there will arise false Christs and false Prophets, who shall shew great signs and wonders; insomuch that (if it were possible) they would deceive the very elect.* Behold, I have told you before: Therefore if it was not so, then the Scriptures would be cavilled against as not true.

But

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But what is there, that Men will not dispute about? Is Truth, the less Truth because it meets with opposition? Disputes arise from various reasons; from pride and vanity; from a wrong head, or corrupted heart; from self-sufficiency; from an affectation of singularity, and being thought wiser than others: But so long as it does not appear that Christians differ about the Fundamentals of their Religion, the disputes about the true meaning of some particular texts, do by no means prove Christianity false.

As I have said before, we have all the evidence for the truth of Christianity that can reasonably be desired, or that the nature of the thing will admit of; for what can be a greater proof of the truth it, than its having made its way so successfully by mean, illiterate, and helpless men, against all the powers of Earth and Hell; and its exposing its followers to the most grievous Sufferings, and at last to Death; which their ardent and affectionate zeal for their Saviour made them voluntarily and with pleasure undergo? They had the truest and most exalted sentiments of the Love of God, and his Son, towards Mankind; esteeming the sacrifice of his Son for the Sins of the World, the highest instance of goodness to his creatures. Neither were they led to all this by enthusiastic Phrenzy: No, it was the impulse of the Holy Spirit that strengthened and enabled them to bear all their sufferings with so much courage and patience, and I may add, pleasure: Like their blessed Master,
they

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they endured the cross, and despised the shame, out of gratitude to him, and from the certain expectation of a crown of Glory in Heaven. May our good God enable all Believers in his Son Jesus Christ to follow the steps of those primitive Martyrs, if ever there be occasion! And may the same good God so illuminate the understandings of all Unbelievers, that they may turn from the Errors of their thoughts and ways, and be saved! And for this purpose, and with no other view, God that knows my heart, knows, I have exerted my utmost (though weak) labours and endeavours. But to proceed:

THE Infidels make another objection against the truth of Christianity, on the account of the difference between the Genealogy of Christ in *St Matthew* * and that in *St Luke*. It must be observed, that the *Jews* took greater care of their Genealogies than any other People in the world; and it is certain, the Genealogies of the *Jews* were then in being, and long after that time; and were carefully preserved in the public Registers: Besides, it appears by Historians, that they could repeat them by heart, as well, and as readily, as they could the Decalogue. Is it probable then that a wrong Genealogy should have been inserted, which would have been destructive of all the arguments for our Saviour's being the Christ? Again, Had the Pedigree been false,

* The Genealogy in *St Matthew* is from *Abraham* downward: In *St Luke* from *Joseph* and *Heli* in a lineal descent, &c.

false, the *Jews* would soon have taken notice of it, for they would have been glad to have laid hold of any advantage to prove our Saviour an Impostor; for in short, every thing relating to *Jesus Christ* depended upon his descent from *Abraham*, and *David*: And as it does not appear the *Jews*, who, doubtless, perfectly understood it at that time, ever made any objection to it, and as it was allowed of in that age, there is no colour for any dispute about it now.

BUT I have still somewhat more to add, to shew that the two Genealogies do not contradict one another, as a low Pamphleteer * has endeavoured to prove, unless it is allowed that *Jesus Christ* was *Joseph's* Son in the common way of procreation by *Mary* his Wife; because otherwise, this Author says, " *Jesus* could not be of the lineage of *David*, nor of the Tribe of *Judah*, as the Scriptures declare him to be." The first text he brings to prove that *Joseph* was *Jesus Christ's* natural Father, is *Luke* ii. 48. *Thy father and I have sought thee sorrowing*: Which is no more to the purpose, than if he had brought the first four letters of the Alphabet to prove it by. I know of no Christian that ever denied this text to be genuine; but it does not necessarily follow, that *Joseph* begat *Jesus*, because *Mary*, *Jesus Christ's* Mother gave *Joseph* the title of Father; for, supposing *Joseph* had been his Father-in-law, there had been no impropriety in the manner of *Mary's* expressing herself.

* J. ELWAL.

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herself. But truly, *Joseph* in Scripture neither appears to be Jesus's Father, or Father-in-law; nor does St *Matthew* or St *Luke* say any thing like it: The first only says, *And Jacob begat Joseph, the Husband of Mary, of whom was born Jesus, who is called Christ.* St *Luke* says, * *He (Jesus) was supposed to be the son of Joseph.* He does not say, *Joseph* begat Jesus. In construction of law, Jesus was the reputed, or supposed Son of *Joseph*; because the sacred Writings tell us, *Joseph* was the espoused Husband of *Mary*. Husband and Wife are so intimately related, as to be reckoned united *one Flesh*; and in the law of Nations many times *one Person*: *Mulier conjuncta viro, concessit in unum.* LUCR.

BUT to proceed; We cannot allow *Joseph* to be Jesus Christ's natural Father, because sacred Authority, the Scriptures, assert the contrary; and tell us in plain terms, that *Joseph* did not know *Mary* his Wife till after Jesus was born, if he did at all. And farther to confirm this truth, that Jesus was not *Joseph's* natural Son, I shall quote another text. When *Mary* asked the Angel *Gabriel*, how she could possibly have a Son, when she knew not a man? The Angel's answer was this; That *the Holy Ghost* should come upon her, and the power of the *Highest* should over-shadow her; therefore also that holy thing which shall be born of Thee, shall be called the Son of God.

* Chap. iii. ver. 23.

AGAIN;

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AGAIN; As Jesus was born of *Mary's* body, and *Joseph* was contracted or espoused to her at the same time, Jesus might well be the reputed Son of *Joseph* by the *Jewish* Nation in general, who would not understand the Scriptures concerning him. Let us consider the Prophet *Jeremiah's* prediction concerning him, chap. xxxi. 22. *The Lord hath created a new thing upon the earth, a woman shall compass a man.* If this text is not alone a clear and evident proof at this time of Jesus Christ's supernatural Incarnation, I will strengthen it with another from the Prophet *Isaiab*, chap. vii. 14. *Therefore the Lord himself shall give you a sign; Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel.* I shall make no answer to the objection against this last text, because several learned men* have already given a satisfactory one; and if Infidels will continue Infidels, for want of hearing both sides of the question, or are beforehand resolved not to be convinced, I know no help for it: Believers can do no more than they have done. But as the Author I have before mentioned has made a grand mistake (whether ignorantly or willingly I will not take upon me to say) I will rectify it: He tells us, "That the Lord, by the Prophet, bid *Abaz* ask a Sign, in regard to his being delivered out of the hands of *Rezin*, the King of *Syria*, and *Pekab*, King of *Israel*, *Isaiab* vii. *Abaz* answered, as may be seen at verse 12. *I will not ask, neither will I tempt the Lord.*"

* See WHITEY, MILLS, PEARSON, &c. &c.

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“*Lord.*” Thus far the Objector is right: But then, in order (as may be presumed) to destroy the application of the text, *Behold, a virgin, &c.* he insinuates, that the Lord, by the Prophet, did actually give a Sign to *Abaz*, notwithstanding his refusal to ask one; therefore I must inform him of his error. The Lord did indeed give a Sign, but not to *Abaz*; for after his refusal to ask one, the Prophet turned to the House of *David* to give the Sign, as appears at verse 13. *And he said, Hear ye now, O House of David; Is it a small thing for you to weary men, but will ye weary my God also?* Verse 14. *Therefore the Lord himself shall give you a Sign: Behold, a virgin, &c.* From whence it manifestly appears, that the Sign was given to the House of *David*, after *Abaz*’s refusal to ask one.

This Sign, given by the Prophet to the House of *David*, when in great danger of being cut off (because the Kings of *Israel* and *Syria* were come against them) of the promise of a Messiah, who was to be of the Seed of *David*, and sit upon the Throne, was a satisfactory security and remedy against those fears of that House being extinguished; and withal, by it was given to the House of *David*, a Promise of a perpetuity of his Kingdom.

Besides all this; It is quite agreeable to our reason, that a Person who was to be stiled the Son of God, and was both God and Man, and Saviour of the World; most glorious and transcendent titles; and likewise a Person whose coming
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into the world was ushered in by the heavenly Host with that sublime and devout Hymn, *Glory be to God on high, &c.* should have a supernatural Incarnation, and not begotten in the usual way of Procreation. And as to the Impossibility of it, none but an Atheist can dispute that; for it is certainly as easy for the omnipotent God to create a Child in the Womb of a Virgin, (if he thinks so fit) as it was to create a Man at first out of the dust. Every one, therefore, who believes the Work of the Creation to be by the Word of an omnipotent Being, can have no doubt about the other.

Moreover, some other circumstances attended this miraculous Incarnation, which must strengthen our belief of its being so; because never any thing like it happened to the greatest of the Prophets; therefore Jesus must be *more than a Prophet*, as it is expressed of Him, *Luke vii. 26.* Did not the Prophets foretel when and where he was to be born? Did not they foretel he was to be laid in a Manger in an Inn? Did not an Angel appear to the Shepherds, to direct them where to find Christ their Lord? Did not an extraordinary star direct the wise men from the *East* where to find our Saviour? And did not they, when they saw Him, fall down and worship Him? Again; Did not *Simeon*, and *Anna* a Prophetess, when they saw Jesus in the *Temple*, declare him to be something more than human, by saying, *Mine eyes have seen thy salvation, &c.* Is it likely a meer Man should be appointed by God to bring
Salvation

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Salvation to the whole World? Is it consistent with common sense, to believe, that a meer Man could have dignity and worth enough to appease by his death the Wrath of God, and make a sufficient Atonement for the sins of all Mankind? And to be an Intercessor for us in Heaven? A Saviour, and a Judge of the World at the last day? Therefore, from all these extraordinary events, and weighty considerations, I have mentioned, we have all possible reason to be confirmed in that revealed Truth of Jesus Christ's being both God and Man.

Permit me to add to what I have already said, another corroborating and convincing proof of Jesus Christ's being a divine Person, which was his resurrection from the dead by his own Power, which He expressly declared before his crucifixion. For tho' God can raise us from the Grave whenever He pleases, we have no Power of ourselves; how then, I must ask, came Jesus Christ by this Power of raising Himself, if he was a meer Man? For I must take it for granted he did so, because He asserted He had that Power in Himself, of laying down his life, and taking it again.

We shall all be raised again, by virtue of our Saviour's Resurrection to Judgment at the last day; and after that, be happy or miserable to all eternity, according to our behaviour in this world.

I must next refute the pamphleteer in regard to what he says of the Gospel of Saint *Matthew*, as we now have it, which he denies to be the true Gospel; and asserts the *Ebionites* Gospel was the true

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true Gospel, because it did not agree with ours, as it stands now in the canon of Scripture. In answer to this, I say, it has been agreed by the most learned Men in all ages, and those that lived nearest to the times of the Apostles, that the *Ebionites* had corrupted the *Hebrew* copy which they used, and left out what they pleased: having, among other things, omitted the Genealogy of Christ: And some will have it, that the *Nazareens* were guilty of the same omission in their copies, which were perfect as to the rest, excepting some additions of their own. *Ephraim* says, he is not certain whether the *Nazareens* did leave out the Genealogy of Christ: And Father *Simon* thinks they did retain it; and that, though they did make some additions, they had the Gospel in its original *Hebrew*, as it was written by St *Matthew*, so far as the proof of our Religion was concerned against Infidels; and moreover, that it remained exactly perfect for many ages, till the Sect of *Nazareens* ceasing, and the *Hebrew* Tongue growing out of use, the *Greek* translation only was preserved; which is ascribed to one of the Apostles or Evangelists. *Theophylact* writes, that St *John* was supposed to be the Person. Again, Father *Simon* says positively, that the Gospel of St *Matthew* was translated out of *Hebrew* into *Greek*, before the *Nazareens* had inserted their Additions. *Papias* says, there were *Greek* Versions of St *Matthew* made immediately upon the first publication; and from hence we may be assured St *John* revised and approved the present Version.

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sion, if it was not made by him : See *Tertullian* against *Marcion* ; *Grotius*, *Eusebius*, and *Epiphanius*, who are of the same opinion ; and *Epiphanius* farther saith, that St *Matthew* wrote his Gospel first in *Hebrew* ; and adds, that some converted *Jews* assured him, that both St *John's* Gospel, and the *Acts* in the *Hebrew* Tongue, were then in the possession of the *Jews* of *Tiberias*, and by reading them, they themselves became Converts, *Hær.* 30. n. 3.

ALSO *Justin Martyr's* Apol. 2. ascribes the four Gospels to the Apostles ; and St *Barnabas* cites the Gospel of St *Matthew* ; and *Justinian* declares, they were read in the Christian Assemblies every Sunday. St *Irenæus*, a Disciple of *Polycarp's*, who was made a Bishop by St *John*, gives a particular account of the Writings of the four Evangelists ; and says, there were four Gospels, and no more ; and that they were written by the Persons whose names they bear. *Irenæus*, Lib. 3. ch. 11, 14. He likewise transcribes the most material passages of the *Acts* of the Apostles at large, and makes St *Luke* the Author of them : So does *Clemens Alexandrinus* ; and distinguishes the four Gospels from others which had assumed that title ; *Stromat.* Lib. 3. p. 465. *Strom.* 5. c. 12. p. 696. *Clemens Romanus*, *Ignatius*, and *Polycarp*, declare the same thing ; and they conversed with the Apostles.

IT is said, that *Pantinus*, cotemporary with *Tertullian*, found the Gospel of St *Matthew* in the *Hebrew* Tongue among some Christians in *Judea*, left there by St *Bartholomew*. Both *Grotius*

tius and Father *Simon* have proved, that the Gospel written by St *Matthew* in *Hebrew* was preserved to the time of St *Jerom* and *Epiphanius*; and that though the *Nazareens* had made some Additions, they had made no alteration in the original Text. As the Scriptures were read from the beginning in their Churches, they could not be lost, neither could they be altered, without being found out.

THE adversaries of Christianity acknowledged the Books of the New Testament to be genuine: Even *Julian* the Apostate owned the Gospels to belong to their Authors; *Cyril Alex. contra Julian.* Lib. 10. And *Celsus* did the same; only pretended that some made alterations in them.

THE most learned in sacred History give us an account of several very ancient copies being now extant, not only in our own Country, but in several other Nations; one in *Greek* and *Latin*, in *Cambridge*, containing the four Gospels, and the *Acts* of the Apostles; St *Paul's* Epistles are to be seen in the *French King's* Library, and another in the *Benedictines* of St *Germain*, which are thought to be a thousand years old at least. Likewise the *Alexandrian* Copy, acknowledged by *Morinus* to be twelve hundred years old; also one *Syriac* Manuscript of the Gospels in the Duke of *Florence's* Library, a thousand years old; and another not much less. Likewise a *Gothic* Translation of the four Evangelists, formerly belonging to the Abby of *Werden*, of a thousand

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years antiquity. Also an ancient *Latin* Manuscript, in our own and other countries. *Musius* had a *Syriac* Manuscript of the Bible above a thousand years old.

MORINUS mentions a *Coptic* Manuscript of the four Evangelists, in the Oratorian Library at *Paris*, that had no distinction of verses, or words, which shews the great antiquity of it. In short, there are no Books in the World of which there are such ancient copies, as of the Scriptures, or of which the Originals are still extant. And as none of them differ in any material point; the Infidels Objections against the various Readings in the several Copies, or Editions, are quite trifling, and not worthy of any further notice: See Father *Simon's Crit. Hist. of the N. T.* Dr *Jenkins*, and other Authors of learning and credit, for the proof of these things.

THE Canon of Scripture was fully settled from the Council of *Laodicea*, which met about three hundred and thirty-five years after our Lord's Incarnation; and said to be settled by St *John*. And the reason why the Authority of some Books were at first doubted of, was the Epistle to the *Hebrews* having no name to it, and the stile being different from St *Paul's* other Epistles; so it likewise happened to St *Peter's* second Epistle, on the account of its stile; but *Eusebius* concludes St *Paul* was the Author of it; and likewise the *Revelation* of St *John*, and the second and third of *John*, *James*, and *Jude*, were rejected by some. But since that time, they have been all admitted into the

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the sacred Canon, and were inserted in the Catalogue of *Laodicea*, and allowed as canonical by the best Authorities and most ancient Historians; and for the References to those Authors, see Dr *Jenkins's Reasonableness of Christianity*. Even the *Socinians* do not reject the Epistle to the *Hebrews*, notwithstanding the Texts do not favour their notions; however, they endeavour to wrest them as much to their purpose as they can.

SINCE then it appears, from the best and most ancient Authorities, that the several Books of the New Testament, as reposed in the sacred Canon, were written by the Authors whose names they bear, without any alteration of any consequence; and since the contrary has never yet been to any material purpose disproved; if Infidels are so hardened as to continue Infidels, and hold out against the strongest and clearest proof and evidences of the Truth of Christianity; nothing more can be done, than has been done for their Salvation; for that is the term I think proper to make use of in this case, because I find in the sacred Writings, (which I firmly believe came to us from God) that there is no covenanted Mercy even for a vertuous Unbeliever who lives under the Gospel dispensation. And yet God Almighty declares in the same divine Book, that He *would have all men to be saved, and come to the knowledge of the truth*; and for that reason He has given us a Revelation of his Will, that we might be without excuse, if we neglected doing his Will when we know

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it, or might know it. *For, though* (as the Apostle expresses it) *in the times of ignorance* (meaning when Men had only the light of Nature for their Guide) *God winked at many errors* that the light of Reason was too much clouded to discover to them after the fall; it is not to be expected He will do it when under the clear light of the Gospel. BELIEVE and REPENT is the constant language of the Gospel: *Without faith, it is impossible to please God*, Heb. xi. 6. and *without holiness, no man shall see the Lord*, Heb. xii. 14. By these expressions, and many more of the same kind that might be quoted out of the sacred Writings, it is evident, God Almighty will not wink at the ignorance and unbelief of such part of the World, as have the opportunity of knowing the Gospel Revelation; except where the lowness of Mens capacities, or some other unavoidable cause, make them capable of little or no Benefit from it. For we may understand from the Parable of the Talents, that God will require no more of us than He has given us an ability to perform.

THE most learned of the Religion-of-Nature Men may argue with all the strength they are able, to endeavour to make it appear, that the light of Reason, if closely attended to, may be able to discover general Truths; that is, what is morally Good or Evil, without the aid of Revelation: But I am quite convinced of the contrary, from my observation of the state of the World both from sacred and profane History, and

and by looking into myself, where I find Reason too weak to have discovered many moral truths that the Gospel of Jesus Christ have made known to us. Besides, in many cases, if the light of Reason should discover the justness and fitness of Things to us; alas! the feeble whispers of Reason would prove too weak to combat our Passions, and induce us to be obedient to its laws, in opposition to our interest, or sensual enjoyments.

I HAVE seen a Book wrote some years ago, entitled, *The Religion of Nature delineated*; which would certainly have been wrote with the most abstracted reasoning; and immense attention and thought, and vastly beyond what any of the antient Philosophers arrived at; if it had come from a Person who had had no knowledge of the Christian Religion: And perhaps we might then have been more easily prevailed on to think the light of Reason sufficient, without any Revelation, from such an excelling performance; or rather, that the Author was supernaturally inspired: But as that great Author was beholden to the Gospel of *Jesus Christ*, the Law and the Prophets, to bring his thoughts to that perfection, we view them in; I must freely confess, that Author has not at all altered my sentiments in regard to the necessity of a Revelation, to make Mankind clearly and fully acquainted with the Will of God; His Promises for the performance of it, and Threatnings for such neglect. But admitting for once, it is in the

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power of human Reason to think in so unerring a manner as our Author, without any assistance from Revelation: what service would one mere Man's thoughts be of to the World, unless every individual was capable of thinking in the same way? One Philosopher to millions of millions of unthinking ignorant Persons, would have but very little effect on the Morals of such Men. Again, admitting such wise Persons thoughts were made public to the World, with the same intention as our Bible is; if it appeared with no better authority, than an human production can give it, it would carry little or no weight with it in regard to moral Virtues; because, if I do not happen to think as this wise Man doth, which is most likely I shall not; have not I then the same right, as a fellow creature, to follow my own way of thinking, as the Philosopher has to follow his? Yes, most certainly; unless restrained by some Divine or National Laws: And if they were only penal Laws, established by the authority of Man, I conceive they would not be very efficacious against the powerful and violent streams of sensual Enjoyment, and Self-interest. If this is allowed to be fact, as I flatter myself it must, because daily experience evinces the truth of it; then it will be clear, that nothing less than Precepts and Doctrines stamp'd with Divine Authority, with the sanctions of future Rewards and Punishments annexed, will do any thing towards making Men virtuous and good. If the

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terrors of the Lord, and human Laws together, will not persuade Men effectually, as I am sorry to say they do not; human Laws, and the Light of Reason will make but few converts to Virtue, considering how sadly the perfection of our nature has been changed by *Adam's* transgression.

To add a few words more on the occasion; Since God has been pleased to reveal his Will to Mankind, we, who know it, and believe the truth of it, have (in my opinion) no necessary call to delineate the Religion of Nature to bring Men into the paths of Righteousness; because it is the only business of the Enemies to the Christian Revelation, and they are very ready to take that task on themselves, they having no other argument to offer against the necessity for any Revelation.

AGAIN; I ask how it is possible for us, who live under the Light of the Gospel, to be competent judges what our sentiments would be about our duty to God and our Neighbour, if we had only the Light of Nature to direct us? We know what our thoughts are now, as Christians, about all religious Matters; but what they would have been under the Religion of Nature, it is impossible to know. I can only say, we have the sacred Writer's word for it, that the light of Nature was a very dim light, and next to none; it being represented under the terms of *Ignorance*, and *Darkness*, and a *state of Darkness*; which can mean nothing less than a wretched,

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wretched, ignorant, uncomfortable state of confusion and error; of corrupt opinions, and abominable practices: Their darkness consisted in a total ignorance of God, and their duty to him; for which reason I must think, no Person uninspired could by the mere light of Nature, delineate the Religion of Nature as Mr *Woolaston* has done, without the assistance of a Revelation. For, as great a Man as he was, if he had lived from his Infancy among the *Hottentots*, his *Religion of Nature* would not have appeared with the advantage it does now.

THERE is a wide difference between giving one's consent to, and approbation of a thing when once proposed; and in being the original in thinking about it, and finding it out, which in reality, is the very case between the Light of Nature, and Revelation. For though by the bare Light of Reason Man would not have been able to have made a discovery of many of those Rules and Precepts given us in the Gospel; yet, after they have been made known to us, our understandings are then clear and perceptive enough to allow them to be just and right for God to command, and us to obey.

HOWEVER, I will for once make this confession to the Deists, and indulge them so far, as to allow it possible for a philosophic Genius, with a virtuous disposition, and uncommon faculties, to dive very deep into Moral Truths and the Fitness of Things, only with the assistance of the Light of Nature: Now, I ask what point

point will the Deists gain by all this? For if the Will of God is so difficult to find out by the Light of Reason (which is certainly the case) that not above one of God's rational creatures among millions of millions is able to do it, for want of equal capacities; then it does undeniably follow from hence, that the Light of Nature is an insufficient Guide for vastly the greatest part of Mankind, in directing them in their duty to their Creator.

AGAIN: I will put the case that one wise Man was able, from the Light of Nature only, to communicate the whole Will of God to all the World; then indeed the World would know what this one wise Man declared to be God's Will; but if the doctrine he taught was not (like *Mahomet's*) very indulgent to their corrupted appetites; sure I am, it would meet with a bad reception, as it must be esteemed only the production of a fellow-creature, and so no farther regarded than as it happened to suit with particular Persons dispositions: And no marvel truly that it should not; without authentick evidence of its being in reality the revealed Word of the ever-living God, such as we have for the truth of the Christian Religion. For if, like *Mahomet*, he pretended himself to be a Prophet; and that he had the doctrine he taught immediately from God; it is most certain, the bare testimony of one Man would gain little credit, and draw but few disciples after him, without compulsory methods.

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AND this was the way the Impostor *Mahomet* took, notwithstanding he had made his Religion so palatable to Men. But the Religion of Jesus Christ had no need of such measures, as it had such various evidences of its coming from Heaven; and consequently, by the Power of God influencing the Hearts of Men for its reception, together with its intrinsic worth. For it must be acknowledged, there is something in the sacred Writings vastly superior to all human productions: And to me the Divine Author appears so glaringly conspicuous throughout the Bible, that my faith does not in the least hesitate about it. The History of the Old Testament is incontestably true; acknowledged so by the whole Jewish Nation: And so connected with the New, that the belief of one must, to all unprejudiced Persons, enforce the belief of the other. Most of the Prophets plainly foretold the coming of the Messiah; and some of them the very time when He did come: And as to our Saviour's Doctrines, and Miracles, they were both equally astonishing. All which gives me the greatest surprize, that there can be total Infidelity in any Man of common sense.

WHAT God tells me, I must believe, or I make him a Lyar; and He had told me *the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us*. And God has also told me, that the same Word which was made Flesh, *made the worlds, &c.* And as it is evident that Jesus Christ was that very Word that was made Flesh, and dwelt among

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mong us; so it is as evident, that Jesus Christ, the Son of God, had a Being before He was conceived in the Womb of the Virgin *Mary*; and must be originally from God, and of the same essence with God. Upon this solid foundation my Faith is built, and the strong buttresses and pillars to it, are the several Predictions in the Old Testament concerning the coming of this Divine Person into the World; which were all exactly fulfilled, together with the several Miracles wrought by Him, and his Disciples, in confirmation of the truth of his Mission and his Doctrine: And in particular, those two grand ones, his Resurrection and Ascension. Now as to the manner how the Son of God was begotten by the Father, whether (as some will have it) by Emanation, Participation, or by Communication from God, or any other way; I shall not attempt to unfold so great a Mystery: nor is it necessary for Man to be solicitous about it, but only to believe there is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and but one God, because it is plain Scripture-doctrine; and leave *the secret things that belong to God*, till such time as God shall think fit to discover them.

AN argument against Jesus Christ's Divinity, notwithstanding his being stiled in Scripture the *Son of God*, and *God*, and *Lord*; has by some been made use of, because both Angels and Men are in the same sacred Writings called the Sons of God; and likewise, because the Scriptures mention *Gods many, and Lords many, &c.* 1 Cor.

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viii. 5, 6. and in *Psalm lxxxii. 6. I said, ye are Gods, &c.* It must be allowed, the Angels are called the Sons of God; and so was *Adam*; and likewise those to whom the *Word of the Lord came*: The reason why the Angels and *Adam* were called the Sons of God, lies so level to the meanest capacity, that it needs no answer; and as to the two last mentioned texts, they can do the opposers of Christ's Divinity no manner of service, for the same Apostle who said *there be Gods many, and Lords many*, said, *that to us there is but one God, the FATHER, and one Lord JESUS CHRIST*: So it is plain, that neither God the Father, nor God the Son can be one of those many Gods and Lords St *Paul* speaks of. Besides, God styles Jesus Christ, his *only begotten Son*, and his *beloved Son*; therefore what the Psalmist says can have no relation to Him: *I have said, ye are Gods, and all of you are children of the most High, Psal. lxxxii. 6.* It would be absurd to put the only begotten Son of God among the Children the Psalmist means, and mentions, as appears by *ver. 5.* where he says, *For they knew not, neither would they understand; they walked on in darkness.* Again, *ver. 7. But ye shall die like Men, and fall like one of the Princes.* The last words, which follow immediately after the words, *I have said ye are Gods, &c.* clearly evince, that Jesus Christ, in whom alone dwelt all the fulness of the Godhead bodily, Col. ii. 9. is not only far distinguished from, but opposed to such Gods as those mentioned by

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by the Psalmist, and St Paul. God, (who is stiled *God over all, blessed for ever*; Rom. ix. 5. which Title signifies *the supreme God*; and was always used by the *Jews* to express that one God of *Israel*) cannot be one of the many Gods.

THE absolute Deists, (I mean such as reject both the Old and New Testament) that follow strictly the Religion of Nature, as Mr *Woolaston* had delineated it, (if there be any such as do) seem to me to be in as safe a state for salvation as those Men who strictly observe the Precepts of Jesus Christ, and at the same time will not allow Him to be more than human. For as I have made the sacred Writings my study all my life time, I am firmly convinced from what I meet with in them, and from my own reasoning on the occasion, that a bare faith in Jesus Christ only as a Prophet sent by God fully to reveal his Will to Mankind, is not a sufficient saving Faith; because we find him stiled, *Matt. i. 23. Emanuel, which being interpreted, (as the Apostle tells us) signifies, God with us*: The whole text runs thus; *Behold, a virgin shall be with child, and shall bring forth a Son, and they shall call his name Emanuel, which being interpreted, is, God with us*. Can any words more clearly express and demonstrate the Divinity of Jesus Christ, or His being both God and Man, than these? How that union is, God has not thought fit to discover to us; and therefore it would be high presumption in us, to attempt to

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to make it out. It is sufficient that God has told us it is so; and Jesus Christ has also said it of himself; so we must, I think, either reject all Revelation, or believe him to be so; which if we do, we must necessarily treat him, as we are directed to do by the Scriptures.

BUT let us reason a little more upon this important Subject: Will common sense allow us to believe, that one of our fellow-creatures should be appointed by God to be the Judge of the World at the last day? How can a mere Man be qualified for so high an office? Because, without the attribute of Omniscience, which is peculiar to God, the demerits of Men could not be known; and without that, no righteous Judgment could be given.

AGAIN: We find by Scripture that Jesus Christ is to be adored and honoured, even as we honour the Father; that He made Himself a voluntary Sacrifice for the Sins of the whole World; that He is our constant Mediator with his Father in Heaven for us: By what I have already taken notice of, and by a great deal more, that I must refer my Reader to the Scriptures for, if he is not fully convinced; sure I am, that Faith in Christ's Doctrines, as coming from God, by the mouth of a Prophet, is not a sufficient Faith, for Salvation, it not being such a Faith as is required of us, unless we mistake the sense of the Scriptures, which is not likely to be the case; nor are we allowed to carve out for ourselves so much as we like; and discard the rest.

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WE have, in my opinion, great reason to be thankful to God, that we are so happy as to live under the Light of the Gospel; so that we have no occasion to rack our brains to find out Moral Good and Evil, and not discover it at last: Moreover, Life and Immortality, Heaven and Hell are brought to light by the same Gospel, which the Light of Nature only could not with any certainty inform us of; the Christian Religion has, without dispute, vastly improved Mankind, not only in a more perfect Knowledge of all Moral Duties, but likewise hath greatly enforced the practice of them, by means of the Sanctions of Rewards and Punishments being annexed to the observance, or neglect of the Laws of God; and with much reason is this Reformation wrought, for there cannot be a higher motive to Piety and Virtue, than a certain Reward of eternal Happiness; or a stronger restraint from Vice, than eternal Misery.

BUT granting that some Moral Duties might be discovered by the Light of Nature; the question then will be what enforcing Power would assist or enable the dictates of our conscience to perform those Duties, when our worldly interest, or sensual enjoyments made a strong opposition, if the *Terrors of the Lord* were wanting to back the feeble and weak impulses of conscience; which, by the aid of our grand Adversary the Devil, we might be made to believe were only the dreams of a distempered brain; by both which means we should soon get over

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our scruples. If the Devil was too subtil for our first Parents, when the Will of their Creator had been so lately discovered to them, so as to make them disobey and break an express command of God's; is it at all unlikely he should be too hard for the children of men, when left only to the weak and uncertain whippers of their mind? *I see a Law in my members warring against the Law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the Law of sin which is in my members;* was the confession of the great Apostle of the Gentiles, in his Epistle to the Romans, ch. vii. 7. and in the 24th verse he cries out, with great concern, *O wretched man, that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death:* After which he appears comforted, and thanks God through Jesus Christ our Lord; that is, He was thankful to God for sending his Son in the Flesh to be a Sacrifice for Sin, and to reveal the Will of his Father to us, that we might through him walk after the Spirit, and not after the Flesh: Which words of St Paul are a confirmation of what I am contending for, the Truth and Necessity of a Revelation. The same Apostle in another place, called *those days*, that is, before any Revelation was given, *the times of ignorance;* but our modern Free-thinkers will have them times of sufficient knowledge, how to serve and please God.

I APPREHEND one true reason, for the Deists being so fond of the Light of Nature, above Revelation, is this; because they are in hopes

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God will wink at their Sins, as the Scripture expresses He did, in the Gentile world; and so, very likely, God will continue to do; that is, make allowances to such as have no opportunity of knowing the Gospel of Christ, and that live up to that Natural Light God has given them. But most certainly God will not, to such as live under the Gospel-Dispensation, and will neither believe the Mysteries nor obey the Precepts of it.

WHEN the Light of Reason is our only Guide, and by that alone we must discover the Fitness of Things, or not at all; no marvel, if we err: For in many cases we should be apt to be partial to ourselves, and suspect our judgments, if it any way interfered with our warmest views; and think that right, or at least indifferent, when it immediately concerned ourselves, which perhaps we might think wrong and unfit when done by others. Now Revelation has quite cured all these doubts and uncertainties, by informing us in every particular, and in plain terms, what is Good and what is Evil; what is Virtue, and what is Vice: We have positive Precepts given us for our Duty to God, our Neighbours and ourselves; so that if we err, we cannot plead ignorance as we might under the Light of Nature only: And over and above all this, our obedience or disobedience to these revealed Laws have Rewards and Punishments annexed to them in another world, in order to encourage us to the one, and deter us from the other; which was not discoverable by our natural capacities.

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THEREFORE, as it appears God did design us for a state of eternal happiness or misery in another World, and on that account made us free agents; sure I am it would have been inconsistent with the Attributes of God not to have given us a clear Revelation of his Will, over and above that inward Light given in general to Mankind: I say, in general, because God Almighty, for proper purposes gave an extraordinary Illumination to some: To use the words of a Right Reverend Prelate; "How could we have reconciled it with the perfections of God, our all-wise Governor, if he had intended us as he does now for an endless state of Happiness or Misery after a transitory Life, and suffered us to be plunged into it, without having communicated to us any previous notice of His intention? In that case we indeed with justice might have pleaded ignorance of God's will, at the great day of account, but as the case stands we are without excuse."

MY way of judging of the Reasonableness and Necessity of a Revelation of the Will of God, to give Mankind a perfect knowledge how to please Him; is, from a consciousness that my own capacity could never have discovered many things to be criminal in the sight of God, that now appear to be so, as they are forbidden by our Creator, who certainly has a right to govern us, and knows what is for our good. Now as every Man is in Duty bound to endeavour to obey as far as he is able the Laws of God, since

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we are made acquainted with them; consequently, Christians must in many respects be more virtuous and pious than Unbelievers, unless an Infidel happen to be constitutionally virtuous, which I believe very seldom happens.

THIS is farther evident, if we observe the contrast between the lives of the Heathen and primitive Christians, as also our modern Unbelievers and sincere Christians; did not the one commit every wickedness that could be invented? Did not the Christians *keep themselves unspotted from the world*, by strictly obeying the Laws of their crucified Saviour? And are we not at this time come to an inundation of Heathen Wickedness? Are not the most detestable and unnatural ones, besides many others, some of which carry neither pleasure nor profit with them, but seem to be only intended to insult God *Almighty*, grown common and fashionable among us? I know no other reason can be assigned for all this, but the great growth of Infidelity: For I must think it impossible for any thinking Person, that believes the truth of the Christian Religion, to be guilty of enormous crimes. I do not say the best of Christians in this age live without sin: No? Far from it; with our utmost care we are all Sinners in the sight of God; but I must hope not so great as we might be in a state of Infidelity.

I HAVE heard some Unbelievers say, by way of excuse for their Infidelity, that they cannot believe such and such things; and if

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they cannot believe, how can their Unbelief in justice be imputed to them as a crime? In answer to which, I assert, that unbelief must be a crime, where there is nothing contrary to Reason that we are required to believe; and where there is withal the strongest Evidence for our belief, and none against it. Which is the case, for our believing the Truth of the Holy Scriptures; nay, even the Mysteries of Christianity, though above our Reason; because we are assured it is the Word of God; and the contrary never was, or ever can be disproved: Besides, these very Men believe a thousand things readily not half so credible as the sacred Writings. A Man may as well say, it is not in his power to be virtuous, or to practise any of the Duties of Christianity; nay, indeed with much more Reason, because most certainly the struggle with Nature, in order to conquer some criminal passions, would be much stronger and more difficult to get over, than the struggle with Reason in order to cure our Unbelief. Lord *Verulam* says, "The Prerogative of God extendeth as well to the Reason as the Will of Man:" So that as we are to obey his Laws, though we find a reluctance in our Will; so we are to believe his Word, though we find a reluctance in our Reason: All unbelief is an act of disobedience; because Faith itself is a matter of Precept, a plain Evangelical Duty.

AGAIN: There is another method to take, which I must earnestly recommend to these Unbelievers,

believers, if they do not choose to continue in their Infidelity ; which is this : To apply frequently and fervently to the Throne of Grace, to take away their *heart of unbelief, and renew a right spirit within them* : To confer with some spiritual Guides of Learning, Wisdom and Piety ; and above all things, to free themselves from Lust and Passion, and all other Prejudices and Prepossessions : To come with an honest, humble, and well-disposed mind, both to believe the truth and practice it. For it is *the upright man that God will guide in judgment ; and those that are gentle, to them will he teach his way. The secret of the Lord being with them that fear him, and to such only He hath promised to shew his covenant*, Psalm xxv. 14. xii. 9. These are the proper means to become a Believer. And if this was done in earnest, and with that warmth of devotion that the nature of the thing requires, I make no doubt of God's hearing their Prayers, and granting their importunate Requests. And in case He should not, for Reasons best known to His unerring Wisdom, they might then with more calmness and tranquility of soul continue in virtuous Infidelity ; I mean, by practising the Precepts of Christianity as Moral Duties ; considering, that as they had done all in their power to create a belief in Jesus Christ, they might from the Goodness of God have some hopes of finding Mercy at the great day of account,

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when all Mysteries will be unfolded, and no Unbeliever will be there.

BEFORE I conclude this Essay, I must take the liberty to offer one thing more to the Infidels serious consideration, because undoubtedly it will be a heavy charge on them at the day of Judgment (if they believe so much from the Light of Reason that there will be such a day, when they must give an account to the great Judge of the World of all their evil thoughts, words and actions) and such a charge, I may say, as they will not be able to answer; which will be *this*, or to the same effect: "Why they could not be contented to enjoy their own way of thinking, without taking indefatigable pains by writing and in conversation, to bring Mankind into the same rebellious sentiments against God and his holy Religion with themselves?" For it is as much Rebellion against God to endeavour to destroy his true Religion and Church, which has been established for almost two thousand years, as it would be Rebellion against a Prince for a few of his Subjects to endeavour to dethrone him and new-model the legal Government. I would fain know what right any private Men have to disturb or destroy any National Religion, or Civil Government? There is a wide difference between endeavouring to reform some errors in the Christian Church, as was done by us Protestants against the Church of *Rome*, and rooting up the whole fabric, and system of it; one

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is certainly praise-worthy, the other is an high affront and insult on the God of Heaven, the Author of it: Moreover, it is the height of vanity and conceitedness for an inconsiderable number of Men to set themselves up to be wiser than millions of millions; for doubtless there are so many Lay-men of sound Judgment and great Learning, that believe the truth of the Christian Religion; and sure I am, *they* cannot be excepted against as not proper Evidences and Judges, as they have no worldly interest to serve by it. I have not brought in that learned body of Men, the Ministers of Christ's Gospel, because they may be thought partial in the case; for I know the Deists say they preach for hire what they do not believe: Not that I can allow it a just one, in any respect; one Reason is enough to give; which is this: Because it is my opinion, that as wise, as pious and as learned as I believe many of them have been in all Ages, to this time, none of them ever had Wisdom enough to be the Authors or Contrivers of the Christian Religion; though they have Learning and Wisdom enough to support the Truth of its coming from God, against its most potent Adversaries.

BUT to proceed: Having made a little digression from what I intended at the beginning of this last Paragraph; I will for once suppose an Unbeliever has taken all possible ways and means to bring himself to a true Christian Faith, and still continues an Infidel; what is then to
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be done? Why in such a case, this Unbeliever ought to keep his opinion to himself; and if he does not, but is officious to corrupt others with his damnable Infidelity, he must then expect no mercy from his Judge at the last Day, because his Sin in not believing will be immensely aggravated by his great assiduity to propagate an opinion contrary to the Belief of the Catholic Christian Church; for on this occasion it will be impossible for Infidels to contrive any alleviating excuse, or indeed to make any claim to the Judge's Favour or Mercy; nay, the very Souls that he or they have been the cause of making miserable, will cry out for vengeance against them; and may well do so, from what our blessed Saviour hath said, *Matt. xviii. 6, 7. But who so shall offend one of these little ones that believe in me, it were better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and that he were drowned in the depth of the sea. Wo unto the world because of offences: for it must needs be that offences come: but wo to that man by whom the offence cometh.*

CONSIDER and lay seriously to heart, O ye Unbelievers, *these things!* And if you are so hardened as to reject the Doctrines of Christianity yourselves, keep your opinions a secret as much as you can within your own breast, that you may not be accessory to the eternal undoing of your fellow-creatures: I will be bold to say, If the Christian Religion will not make Men pious, honest, righteous and good, no other Religion

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igion can do it; Why then do ye Unbelievers take such pains to make Men desert *that Religion* which, (if it had not come from Heaven, as it most undoubtedly did) is beyond dispute the most perfect system of Doctrines that ever the World gave birth to? How immensely is our understanding illuminated and enlarged by the Gospel? What did we know of God? What did we know of our Duty to God? What did we know of our state after Death, till Revelation discovered all these important things to us? Very little, it must be owned, with any certainty: And yet, now we have it, we are displeased with it, because it is too pure and too strict for us to comply with and embrace, so we are assiduous to get rid of it, by endeavouring to make the world believe it is all Priest-craft; and that we are under no obligation to follow any other Directions and Laws than what the Light of Nature will afford us.

To conclude all: The case between Believers, and Christian Deists stands thus: If Believers of the truth of the Christian Religion are deceived about it, they have such strong Evidence, the sacred Writings, to plead their cause in defence of their errors, that sure I am, God Almighty is too just and good to punish *those* that were led into a virtuous error, by such powerful and irresistible motives as the Holy Bible furnish us with, over and above the intrinsic worth and excellency of the Doctrines and Precepts therein contained: So that it must be said, if it is a fraud,

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fraud, it is a very pious and useful one to the world, and far surpassing any thing that has ever been given us by the wisest and most virtuous of the Heathen Philosophers, so that it evidently appears, that the Believers and Practisers of the Doctrines of Christianity must be in a safe condition either way. But on the other side, if the Scriptures appear at last to be the Word of God, and not the invention of Men; what then must be the fate of Unbelievers in a Christian Country. Since by *that Word* we are told, that *there is no name under Heaven by which we can be saved, but by the name of Jesus*; with many other Texts to the same purpose: And if God of his infinite goodness and mercy hath thought fit to appoint a Saviour to die for our sins, and to be our Mediator in Heaven, according to the Scriptures, and hath by the same sacred Writings commanded all those who have an opportunity of hearing of Him and his Doctrines, absolutely to believe in Him, and obey his commands; are we, notwithstanding all this, insolently to deny and reject the Author of our Salvation, when we are in plain terms told the dreadful consequence of it? The very thought strikes so much horror and trembling into my Soul, that I must assure Unbelievers of all Denominations, that I think the danger of Unbelief is so great in regard to Mens Salvation who live under the Gospel-Dispensation, that if I could live ten thousand years in the vigour of youth, uninterrupted health, tranquility and pleasure,
and

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and withal be Emperor of the Universe; I would not, (if I know my own heart) on those terms disbelieve the Truth of the Christian Religion; (even though I was a strict Moral Man :) For what is ten thousand years to Eternity? And *what will it profit a man to gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? For without faith and holiness no man shall see the Lord;* and for all such (and such only who live in a Christian Country) Jesus-Christ has opened the Gate of everlasting Life.

I SHALL finish this *Essay* with a Prayer to Almighty God, for the Conversion of all Unbelievers.





P R A Y E R.

O Eternal, most Adorable, and Good God! Father of our Lord Jesus Christ; Hear, I most humbly and earnestly beseech Thee, my Supplication and Prayer: I have endeavoured to know thy Will, and to obey thy holy Laws; but if, after all my care and pains to find out the Truth, my Faith should be erroneous; I most devoutly beg thy Almighty assistance, that my understanding may be so illuminated by the Spirit of Truth, as to have a right Faith in all things: And may that Faith lead me into the Paths of Righteousness. And now, O Lord, I have

A P R A Y E R. III

have approached the Throne of Grace for myself, I will not leave it until I have implored of thy Divine Majesty the same favour for my Fellow-Creatures, and in particular for Those who reject thy revealed Word, and love Darkness rather than Light. O merciful Father, who art infinitely Good and Gracious, and wouldest have all men to be saved; Grant me (if consistent with thy unerring Wisdom and Justice) my Petitions through the Merits and for the Sake of thy dear Son my blessed Redeemer. *Amen, Amen.*

F I N I S.



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Amen, Amen. 53 At 5

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